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Volume 18 August, 1954 Number 2

Our Feature Novel

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Old Doc Guthrie was the first victim, in a series of drygulchings. And the most puzzling thing was the motive for them.

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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, *Editor*

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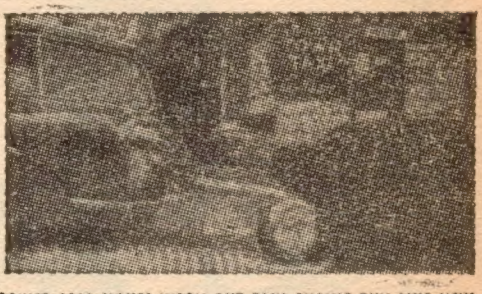

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THE TRADING POST

Department of Special Features

RANGE WAR by Harold Gluck

THE LAST of the important cattle wars was the somewhat famous "rustler war" of 1892, in which a campaign was made by the cattlemen of Wyoming against the rustlers of Johnson County, Wyoming. This "war" was not without its opera-bouffe aspects, though it was ventilated for each day for over three weeks in the daily press, and heralded to the corners of the world. It was very much an affair of going after rustlers with a brass band, and it did not result so successfully as was hoped by the leaders of the project.

Only two men were killed in this "war," yet the matter attracted far more attention than any similar clash that ever occurred in the cattle country. This was simply because of the newspaper notoriety it had. An old cowman covered the case perfectly when he said: "There might be twenty-five men killed each day down in Lincoln County in the old times, and

[*Turn To Page* 83]

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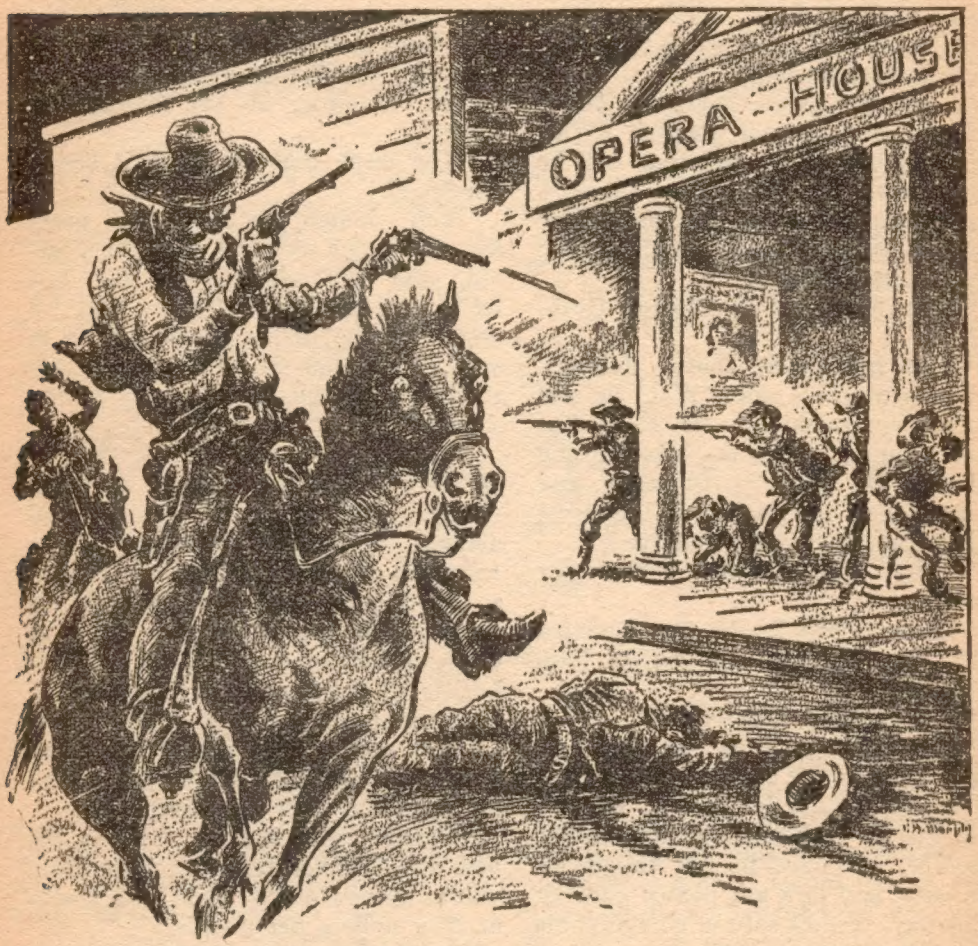
The riders poured lead into the Opera House as they plunged down the street. The return fire was effective; two dropped.

First, it had been old Doc Guthrie. Then, the dry-gulcher had tried to kill Raiken, and others. What did he expect to prove by these killings? Charles asked himself.



BUSHWHACKER'S REVENGE

By J. J. Mathews

FENTON'S Mansion House was a long building fronting Tucson's main street, and in the office of the proprietor and manager, Roger Fenton, at that moment sat Doctor Charles Bowman.

"We're glad to have you here, Doc," Fenton was saying. "This town has need of a leech bad. Y'see, we lost our only doctor three days ago, so you just come at the right time. You look rather

young, but I suppose you know your business."

"I hope so, sir," said Charles. "I spent a year and a half working in New York hospitals. I came out here to find a practice for myself."

"I reckon you've found it, Doc," said the middle-aged Fenton. "This town is growin' fast and thar will be plenty work for you. Also, thar's a ready-made office you can have. Doc Dan Guthrie's old place is right on the corner of this building."

"What happened to Doctor Guthrie?"

Fenton glanced at Charles dubiously, and stroked his chin. "Wal," he said slowly, "you might say that he died of a combination of two poisons—alcohol and lead. He drank purty heavy, and he was found one mornin' in the street with a forty-five slug in his back."

"Gosh!" said Charles. "Who shot him?"

"No one rightly knows. But the town thinks that the Doc ran foul o' John Raiker."

"John Raiker? Who is he?"

"Wal, he sorta runs the town—or thinks he does. He owns the *Oriental*—the largest saloon in Toos'n; he also owns the Op'ry House and some other peoperty. He likes to run things his own way, and he's got plenty gunmen in his pay. It ain't safe to go aginst his wishes. You use a gun?"

"I've never handled one in my life."

"Ummm," said Fenton. "It's a useful tool in a fightin' place like this."

"I can fight—with my fists," said Charles. "I was the middleweight champion of Transylvania School, but I've never had any occasion to use a gun. Perhaps I could learn, although a doctor's job is to cure the injured, not cause injuries."

"He has to protect himself," said Fenton. "You'll be needin' a nurse assistant, I reckon?"

"I don't think so," said Charles. "I don't expect to be very busy for some time."

Fenton looked at Charles' handsomeness. "You don't know—you just don't know," he said sagely. "Wal, I got a nurse for you and I guess she'd be right handy. She's workin' for me at the moment—doin' my books—but that don't matter. You see, she was the nurse for the last doc—she's Guthrie's darter, Caroline. So she knows her work."

"You mean that Dr. Guthrie had a daughter?"

"Yep, though his wife died years ago. Carrie's a nice girl, nineteen-year-old, and she understands the last leech's tools. Come with me and I'll show you the fixin's. I told Carrie to straighten things up, so I suppose she's there. I'll only charge you forty dollars a month."

THEY WENT out through the wide, front door, on to the veranda and along to the rooms at the corner. There were two of them, neither very large—a waiting-consulting room and a surgery. In the surgery a girl was down on her knees scrubbing the bare boards of the floor. She looked up in embarrassment as they entered, and Charles saw a very pretty and well-formed girl, with dark hair, and sweeping eyelashes over intelligent eyes.

"Carrie," said Fenton, "this is the new doc—Doctor Bowman. He's hirin' you as nurse if it's all right with you—at fifty dollars per month."

Charles opened his mouth to protest. He could not afford to hire an assistant, even at that price, but one look at the girl's eager face made him change his mind. He would get the money somehow, even if he had to make Fenton wait for the rent—which Fenton deserved anyhow, for taking matters so much in his own hands.

"How do you do?" he said to the girl. "It looks as though you've started work already."

The girl blew a wisp of hair out of her eyes. "The dust accumulates so fast," she said. "I'll be glad to work for you, Dr. Bowman, although I have never been trained by anyone but my father."

"And that's plenty," said Fenton.

"Doc Guthrie was one fine leech, and you wouldn't find a better. Wal, Doc, you better get your shingle out. Thar's on'y one signwriter in Toos'n, and I'll send him in to see you. Wal, I better go back to my chores."

He went out, and Charles felt rather shy. He wandered around the rooms, looking at the late doctor's old volumes, examining the fittings and implements. At last he went back to the girl as she was carrying out a bucket of dirty water to throw in the street.

"Your father left quite a deal of valuable material here," he told her. "I guess it belongs to you. I cannot afford to buy it from you just yet, but later, if I make any money—"

"I think it must belong to Mr. Fenton," she replied. "We owed him quite a lot of rent. He has been very kind."

"He struck me that way," said Charles.

The girl emptied the bucket, put it down, and wiped her hands. "It won't take me long to get things straightened," she said.

A shadow darkened the sunny doorway, and Charles saw a young man standing there, handsome in a somewhat reckless way, and he looked at Charles with curiosity and a slight animosity.

Carrie hastened to make the introductions. "Oh, Doctor, this is Will Fitch—the new doctor, Dr. Bowman."

The men shook hands.

"Glad to know you, Doc," said Will. "It's nice to know thar's a doctor in the town. Not that Carrie weren't plenty, but—wal, a man—"

The girl laughed. "Don't get embarrassed, Will," she said. "I know what you mean."

Charles walked to the door and Will stood aside. "I'll go and get my things," he said. "Pardon me."

He went back to Fenton's office, where he had left his cases of surgical instruments, although he had a bedroom upstairs.

"How do you like it, Doc?" asked Fenton.

"Quite good," said Charles. "Miss Guthrie tells me you own all the stuff for back rent."

Fenton shook his head. "Not me," he said. "It belongs to her. Any rent they owed was wiped out with his death. But don't let that give you similar ideas, young feller. Don't you be owin' rent when someone puts a slug into you."

Charles smiled wryly. "You're a very cheerful man, Fenton. By the way, I just met a young fellow named Will Fitch."

"So you met Will, eh? Wal, you might as wal get used to it—he's been chasin't after Carrie for years. Her father didn't like him, so his road hasn't been too easy."

"And what do you think of him?"

Fenton shrugged. "Will's all right, I guess. He lives with his family on a farm a few miles outta town. Just an ordinary lad."

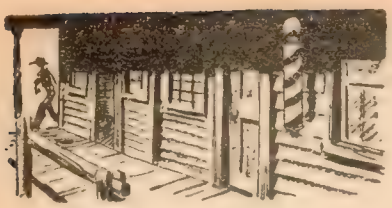
"I see," said Charles. "Then I might be losing my nurse before very long? Oh, well. How does one amuse himself in this town at night?"

"You can gamble, you can drink in the saloons, you can chase women—but I guess most o' the town will be at the Op'ry House tonight to see Wolffe's Wild West Troupe."

THE MAIN act on the bill was Rosie Fletcher, and she was greeted with cheers. A metal plate was erected as a back-stop for her bullets, and after a demonstration of rope-twisting, cutting cheroots in two with a bull-whip and such like feats, she got to work with a sixgun and a Sharps rifle.

She was attractively dressed in a wide Mexican sombrero, a fringed buckskin jacket, high leather riding boots, and her very handsome upper legs were covered by pink tights. In fact, her appearance was so attractive as to take the men's minds off her expertness. Around her waist was slung a double cartridge belt, supporting two sixguns in holsters.

She began with the rifle. Upon the metal plate, an ace of spades was



pinned. She turned her back on it, faced the audience, placed the rifle over her shoulder, glanced in a small hand mirror, and fired. Wolffe, in top hat and long coat, took the ace to the front of the stage and showed the hole in the center, amid great applause.

In the meantime, a slab of heavy timber had been erected at one side. Rosie put aside the rifle and stepped to the center-board.

"Ladies and gents," she said, "I now issue a challenge to your gun-slicks to come up here on the stage. Any man who can shoot straighter will be rewarded with a kiss. Now, what about it, gents?"

A roar of talking took place as men urged their champions forward. But the champions were not eager, in spite of the promised reward.

A tall man in a top hat stood up in the front seat. Charles gathered from the cries of the crowd that this was John Raiker, the owner of the Opera House. He was in his early thirties, wore his fair hair long, and he had a fair moustache. He held up his hand for silence.

Silence came quickly, showing the power of the man.

"I'd like to nominate Red Cotter for that kiss," said Raiker.

"Trot him up," said Rosie, with a grin, her hands on her hips.

"Red stood up. He was a small man, about twenty-five, with flaming red hair similar to Rosie's own. He carried two guns, and his hard-bitten face was, at the moment, as red as his hair. Urged by his boss, he clambered on to the stage. The crowd cheered and yelled out instructions. Rosie held up her hand for silence.

"Howdy, Red," she said. "This is how the contest will be conducted. On that board a card will be placed, after we have turned our backs to it. You and me will face the other way with our arms above our heads. At the count of three, we will swing round, draw and fire, trying to hit the card. You get that?"

"One-two-three!" said Wolffe, and the two went into action.

Red Cotter was a noted gunman, and he was almost lightning quick. He swung round, sighted the card as he drew, and brought up his gun. A gun fired at his left, and he saw the card flick. His own shot, a half-second later, missed the card altogether. He was not in the same class as Rosie. There was a roar of cheering.

Raiker, still on the stage, held up his hand. "Folks," he said, "I backed the wrong hoss, but the little lady has the advantage here. She is doing this every day, and is in constant practice; she is used to the stage and is not nervous; this set-up is old stuff to her—but not to Red. I would like to set a little contest if she don't mind."

"Go right ahead," said Rosie.

"Wal," said Raiker, "on the back wall o' the hall, thar is hangin' a picture o' Shakespeare. I'd say that was forty feet away. It is hangin' by fine wires. It is ten feet over everyone's head. Do you think you can cut that wire with a slug?"

"I know I can," said Rosie, "but you better not make this sharp-shooting. Red mightn't get his gun up fast enough, and put a slug into somebody."

There was a roar of laughter, and Red went redder than ever.

"You need not turn your backs," said Raiker. "Just put up your hands until the word three. Can you see the wire?"

"Just," said Rosie, "but that's enough. What about the damage to the wall?"

"Don't worry about that," said Raiker. "I own this place. Can you see the wire, Red?"

"Shore!"

"Good. Now, hands up. One, two, three!"

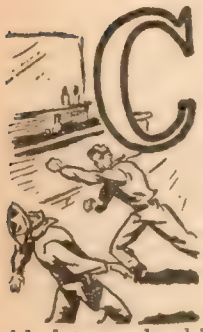
The audience half-ducked, keeping

their eyes on the contestants. Down swept Red's right hand; down came both Rosie's hands. She moved much quicker than Red, and she drew both guns, bringing them up with lightning speed. The right hand fired and, like a flicker of light, she did the border shift—changing one gun for the other by dropping the right hand gun and catching the left hand gun in her right hand, and the other gun in her left hand. The new gun fired at the same time as Red's, she getting in two shots to his one. Rosie was all out to do it, but it proved she was simply playing with Red in the earlier contest.

Rosie's first shot had cut the wire, and the picture had fallen. Her second shot had smashed the frame of the falling picture, the bullet passing close over the heads of those standing along the back.

The crowd went mad with enthusiasm. Rosie holstered her guns smartly, bowed to the crowd, turned to the abashed Red, seized his red hair, kissed him on the brow, bowed again, waved a hand, and went off.

2



CHARLES BOWMAN started work the following day. Caroline Guthrie showed him her father's books, and he found many unfinished cases, including some confinements quite close to fulfillment. He decided to make his rounds of these patients to introduce himself, and see what he could do for them. For this purpose he packed a little, black bag, and borrowed a horse from Roger Fenton.

His shingle was hung out during the day while he was out of town touring the outlying farms, and it was nearly sundown when he returned, rather weary and very dusty, to Tucson. He stabled the horse in the shed back of the Mansion House. He was coming from the shed in the half-light, when he bumped into a man.

"Sorry," said Charles.

The man was a big fellow, as big as Charles himself, and he was drunk. He glared at Charles. "Ain't no use bein' sorry," he snarled. "You ain't pushin' Sam Hamilton about like that for nothin'."

"I've said I'm sorry," said Charles, and went to pass on.

But Hamilton was a nasty-tempered person when drunk. He grabbed the young doctor's arm and swung him round, then aimed a punch at Charles' chin.

Charles saw the blow coming with plenty of time to spare. He ducked the swing, and then stepped in and jolted a short, right hand punch to Sam's jaw. Sam's head flicked back and he stepped away—to be jolted further by a left and right which sent him flat on his back.

"You dirty—," began Sam, getting on to one elbow while he tore out a gun. "I'll fill ya with lead."

Charles was unarmed. He debated jumping in and trying to get the gun, but he would not have time. Sam was drawing back the hammer—.

A gun roared and Sam's gun went flying. Sam glared down at his bloody hand, smashed by a heavy bullet.

"Never draw on an unarmed man, pardner," said a female voice, and Charles looked up.

At one of the back upstairs windows was Rosie Fletcher, a six-gun in her hand.

"That was a very neat bit of punching you did there, stranger," she said, "but fists are not much good against a coyote with a gun. Most men in Arizona carry a hogleg. Why don't you?"

"I'm a doctor from the East," said Charles. "Thank you very much for saving my life."

"Think nothing of it," said Rosie. "You must have saved a lot of lives in your time."

Sam had staggered off into the twi-

light, whimpering, and nursing his injured hand. He was murmuring something about a "leech."

Charles called after him: "Here, let me look at that hand!" But Sam had gone.

"Let him go, Doc," called Rosie, "and take me into supper."

"I'd be glad to," said Charles.

"I'll see you at the dining room entrance in two minutes," said Rosie, and vanished from view.

It was three minutes later when Rosie joined Charles, but perhaps she had spent the extra minute wisely. She was certainly a colorful personality, as well as being pretty. Charles felt rather bashful as he escorted her to a table, with all eyes upon them. He felt slightly proud, too, because most of the men's eyes were envious. The eyes of the womenfolk were scornful—and jealous.

"You certainly create a sensation," he remarked to Rosie as they sat down.

Rosie shrugged. "All part of the act," she said. "It pays to advertise. We show folks are all fake, you know."

"Not all fake," said Charles. "I saw your show last night, and you can't tell me your act was fake."

"Not exactly fake," said Rosie, "but I make it look a lot harder than it is. You see, it all comes from practice—doing the same thing over and over, so that the job becomes easy. But Raiker put a stiff one up to me in that picture-shooting bit. That was not pre-arranged, although Wolffe says he will arrange something like that in future, it is such a good stunt."

Charles laughed. "Have you ever played in New York?"

"Sure. That's where I come from. I first learned my shooting in a gallery owned by my father. Then I went on the stage—I was only a kid then—six years ago—in the chorus of 'The Children of the Wood' at Niblo's Garden Theatre."

"I know it—on Broadway!" said Charles enthusiastically.

The two of them were so busy swapping stories of New York that they forgot the people around them as they ate. The meal ended, and they still sat there talking.

In the middle of a sentence, Charles paused to find Caroline at his elbow.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your supper, Doctor," said the girl, her eyes upon him, and seemingly not seeing Rosie. "There is a patient waiting for you."

"And an audience will be soon waiting for me," put in Rosie. "How about tomorrow morning, when I'll show you some fancy tricks with a sixgun?"

"I'd be delighted," said Charles, rising.

Caroline had turned, and was walking back toward the door of the dining room. Rosie's eyes followed her. "A very pretty girl," she said, and added, in her direct way: "Yours?"

Charles grinned. "No," he said. "I only arrived here yesterday. She is my nurse, and she has a young man."

Rosie watched the girl walk from the room, and then her eyes came back to Charles questioningly.

"So she has a young man," she said. "Then, why don't she like me? Maybe she's not satisfied. Well, Doc, I'll call in and get you in the morning. Going to the show tonight?"

"I might as well."

"Then I might see you after the show," said Rosie. "So long." They had reached the door. She turned for a final word. "And don't flirt with your little nurse. She's too serious—she plays only for keeps."

Charles laughed. "What gives you the idea I would flirt with anyone?"

"You," said Rosie, and made for the stairs.

CHARLES turned in at the door of his surgery. A man was standing in his waiting room, nursing a right hand wrapped in a dirty, stained bandana. It was the drunk he had hit, and the marks of his punches were plain on the man's face. Sam was almost sober now, the pain having achieved that miracle.

When he saw Charles, he stopped nursing his right hand, and his left hand flew toward a gun.

Charles stopped just inside the doorway. "Don't be a fool!" he said sharply. "If you shoot me, who will attend to your hand?"

Sam paused. "Are you the leech?" he asked.

"I am the new doctor, yes. I am also unarmed. Come in here and show me your hand."

He went into his surgery. Sam paused for a moment, got a spasm of pain in his hand, and decided to defer shooting the doctor. He followed Charles. Caroline had a dish of water ready.

"You could have washed this, nurse," said Charles.

"I didn't like to touch it," said Caroline. "I expected you any moment, then I went searching for you."

"I see," said Charles, and got to work on the wound.

Sam refused a whiff of ether, and stood white-faced while the doctor and Caroline worked over his injured hand. At last they were finished, and Charles offered Sam a stiff shot of corn whisky. Sam swallowed it at a gulp, and some color returned to his cheeks as the fiery fluid went to work.

"How much I owe you, Doc?" he asked.

Charles looked at him. "How much do you think?" he said.

"I reckon I owe you a hot slug," said Sam, "because you got me this. But I been thinkin' while you worked, and I guess it weren't all your fault."

"We'll blame it on the booze," said Charles.

"Except them punches you handed me," said Sam. "I'm gonna pay them back when my hand gets right. You never shot me, but I know who did."

Charles grinned. "You are not going to try and outdraw Rosie, are you?" he said. "Did you see the show last night?"

"No, but I heard she was greased lightnin'—and I *know* she's accurate. Still, we'll see. Thar's two dollars. That settles with you," Sam said, throwing the money on the table.

"Now go home to bed," said Charles. "You don't want that hand to turn septic—and you have too much alcohol in your blood as it is."

Sam went out. Charles smiled after him.

"So that woman shot him," said Caroline.

"Rosie? Yes. He attacked me and I knocked him down. She must have been watching from her window. He drew a gun and she shot him in the hand—saving my life, I guess."

"I see," said Caroline, and turned to clean up.

Charles washed his hands in a dish. "You are very efficient," he observed.

"Thank you," she replied.

They both looked up as someone entered the waiting room, crossed it, and stopped in the doorway. It was Will Fitch.

"Howdy," he said curtly. "I thought you would be through afore this, Carrie. I got tickets for the Op'ry House, and we gotta be early to get a seat."

"I'm not particular about going," said Caroline.

"You should," observed Charles. "It is quite a good show."

"Especially your friend, Rosie, I hear," said Caroline tartly.

"Yes, especially my friend Rosie," said Charles gravely.

"Thar you are, then," said Will. "You can spare her, can't you, Doc?"

"Certainly," said Charles. "I have no cases tonight, and I will leave word with Fenton that we can both be found at the Opera House."

"You are going again tonight?" asked Caroline.

Charles shrugged. "Might as well," he said. "I have no taste for saloons or dance halls or gambling."

"I'll go," said Caroline to Will. "Wait till I change."

She went past Will, and they heard her footsteps clicking along the veranda. Will glanced at the pile of bloodstained rags in the waste receptacle. "Had a patient?" he asked.

"A man had a slight accident with a gun," said Charles.

"Nasty work for a gal," said Will. "The sooner Carrie marries me the better. I'll take her away from this."

"I fancy she likes the work," said Charles. "Has she promised to marry you? When is it to be?"

"I dunno," said Will. "She won't say, and she ain't promised yet."

"It might be a good idea not to mention taking her away from this work. She might like it so much she may prefer it to marriage. Is that what she says?"

"No. She says she won't marry me until she finds out who put a slug into her father. I been tryin' to find out, but what chance have you without a clue? He was drinkin' in Raiker's *Oriental* till about three in the mornin'—then he staggered out, and no one hears a shot, and he's found dead at sun-up. How can I find out who did it?"

"Haven't you any suspicion?"

"I guess it was one of Raiker's crowd, but how can I pin it on them? I reckon she should drop the idea and get married while she's young. I ain't gonna wait till she's old."

"I thought you were very fond of her?"

"I am, Doc, I am. Why, I'd do anythin' for Carrie. But—wal, you see how it is. It seems impossible, don't it?"

Charles nodded. "It certainly doesn't look very promising," he remarked.

3

THE OPERA House was packed again. This time the crowd was a rougher one, and several of the front seaters were drunk. They made no bones that their reason for coming was Rosie. The other acts got a bad time.

The drunks kept chanting "Bring on Rosie—we want Rosie!"

Bernard Wolffe came to the center of the stage and held up his hand. "Hold hard, gents," he said, when he could be heard. "I'm mighty pleased that you like Rosie's act—"

"Her legs!" roared a drunk.

When the laughter had died down, Wolffe went on. "I'm mighty glad you like—er—Rosie. But we have a full house tonight, and these other people are entitled to see the rest of the show. You wouldn't like Rosie to do *all* the show, would you?"

"Yes," roared many voices.

Wolffe shook his head in remonstrance. "I thought you liked Rosie—and yet you want to work her to death. Besides, her act would not last all night. So I'm afraid, gents, you will just have to wait. Now, if you will just—."

"We want Rosie—bring on Rosie!" the chant began again.

"I'll go and get her!" yelled a big man named Jake. "If you won't—I will."

He made for the stage, but Raiker, who was again sitting in a front seat, grabbed him as he was clambering up, and pulled him back.

The man turned and bleared at Raiker. "You keep outa this, Raiker!" he yelled, and his pals started to rise.

"This is my Op'ry House," said Raiker, "and while your'e in it, you'll behave yourself."

Jake pushed him back, and started to clambor on to the stage again. Raiker gripped the seat of his pants and hauled him back. Jake turned and hit Raiker a glancing blow in the face—and then pandemonium broke loose.

Raiker struck back at Jake, and one of Jake's drunken friends hit Raiker. Red Cotter, who was standing by, hit the friend. There were more friends, on both sides. Loose chairs were overturned, and women screamed and made for the exits.

John Raiker and some of his friends reached the stage and stood to defend it against all comers. Charles, without

thinking twice, decided to join them. He pushed his way through the milling throng, and started to attack the drunks from the rear, having a decided advantage by his surprise offensive. Three of them went down before they became aware of him. Then the others turned on this new enemy, and Raiker and his friends found themselves without opponents. Charles stood in the center of a mob, hitting out right and left.

The crush was so thick that there was no chance for anyone to swing a chair, or even use a gun; it was simply short-arm punches at the most menacing face.

With a yell of triumph, Raiker and his men took flying dives upon the drunks surrounding Charles, and more of the intoxicated brawlers went down among the trampling feet. In a few minutes it was over.

The sober ones had naturally won. Odd fights in the corners of the hall petered out when the main melee ceased. Charles mopped a split lip and looked for his hat. Raiker picked it up and handed it to him. "You turned the tide in our favor, stranger," said the town boss. "They outnumbered us two or three to one, but that rear sally of yours did the trick. My name's John Raiker. Shake."

"I'm Dr. Charles Bowman," said Charles, shaking hands.

Raiker's eyebrows went up. His gunmen were clearing the drunks out of the hall, using their boots freely.

"A doctor?" said Raiker. "Wal, you shore swing a wicked right and left for a medico. What made you join the fight?"

Charles grinned. "I'm not quite sure," he said. "I suppose I just sort of like a fight. Maybe it was because I'm a friend of Rosie's."

"You are! She's a nice gal. Congratulations."

"I'm not that much of a friend." said Charles. "We've met, that's all."

"You're not with the show?"

Charles spoke carelessly, but he was watching Raiker. "Heaven's, no!" he said. "I'm the new doctor in the town; I've taken Dr. Guthrie's place."

Raiker's face did not change. He nodded and smiled. "That's good," he said. "We need a leech in this town. Care to come over to my place for a drink? The show seems to be busted."

It was not "busted," for at that moment Wolffe poked a cautious head round the wings, scanned the hall, saw that the drunks had been emptied out. "Ladies and gents," he yelled, "if you will all resume your seats—if you can find 'em—the show will go on where it left off."

"It will," said Raiker, definitely. "I'll post my boys at the doors in case any of them hombres come back."

CHARLES had a split lip and a blackening eye. There were several other casualties, but none of them was hurt sufficiently to need his professional attention.

When Rosie came on the stage to do her act, there was much peaceful applause. She ran her eyes along the front seats and they fell on Charles, noting especially his eye and lip. She gave him a personal smile, and went through her paces.

"Have you an opponent for her tonight?" Charles whispered to Raiker.

"No—thar's no one in town could hold a candle to her. What about you? If you can use a gun like you can use your fists—"

"I can't use a gun at all."

"Then we'll just have to let Rosie be the champ."

After the show, Raiker and Charles left together. They were standing outside on the porch when Will Fitch and Caroline came out.

"Good night," said Charles.

" 'Night," said Will, but Caroline did not anwer.

"She won't speak to you while you're with me," said Raiker, with a chuckle. "She's a nice gal, is Carrie, but she thinks I'm a bad man. In fact, she thinks I tombstoned her father."

"And did you?" asked Charles, casually.

"Nope," said Raiker. "But I know who did!"

Charles was startled. "How could you know?" he asked.

"I was told by someone who witnessed the killing."

"Why hasn't that someone told other people?"

"This guy would talk to me—but not to other people."

"And who did the killing?" asked Charles.

Raiker gave him a sharp glance. "John Raiker never tells tales outta school," he said. "He minds his own business, and expects other people to mind theirs."

Charles smiled. "Is that meant for me?" he asked.

"If you want it that way. Wal, all the drunks seem to have been absorbed by the saloons. I guess they are well under the table by now. They're a rowdy bunch, and always a nuisance in town. I've had to have two of 'em shot, and they are barred from my saloon. They come from a few miles out of town—the Lazy X ranch. I guess I better tell Jim Jones, the ramrod of the outfit, to keep his boys at home, or they'll get hurt."

"You seem to give a lot of orders."

"Someone has to give 'em," said Raiker. "Art Wilson owns the ranch, but he seldom comes to town. He's gettin' old, and he leaves things to Jones. The boys are all right when they're sober, but they must have got rid of a lot of forty-rod while waitin' for the show to start. And when they gets likker in, the sense goes out and they begin a ruckus. Wal, Red, how's things?"

The last was to the small gunman, who had just loomed out of the darkness.

"O. K., boss. The Lazy X boys is either out cold or has ridden home. I guess there'll be no more trouble from them tonight."

"Good. Meet the new leech, Red. Dr. Bowman—Red Cotter."

Red pushed out his hand. "Glad to know you, Doc," he said. "I always like to know the sawbones—never know when I'll need one. You comin' over to the *Oriental*, boss?"

Raiker looked at Charles. "How about a drink, Doc?"

"Thanks," said Charles. "But I thought I'd wait for Rosie."

"In that case," said Red, "I'll wait with you."

Raiker laughed. "*You* get along to the *Oriental*. I'll come along later."

"Aw, Boss—she's some gal! Wal, be seein' you, Doc, but not too soon, I hope."

Red was swallowed up by the night again.

A few moments later Rosie came from the Opera House.

"Ah," she said, "I see I have some stage-door johnnies—but I can't see the flowers and the candy or the hansom cab."

"I could get you a buckboard," said Raiker, sweeping off his hat.

"I don't want my teeth shaken out just yet," said Rosie. "And what is the next suggestion? Supper, I guess."

"Wal, I'll be gettin' along," said Raiker. "I'd offer you the hospitality of the *Oriental*, but I don't—"

"Let's make it a threesome," said Charles. "That is, if it is all right with the lady."

"O. K.," said Rosie. "Where is this *Oriental?*"

The three set off along the boardwalk, one each side of the girl, who chatted gaily as they went.

THE *ORIENTAL SALOON* was quite a large place, built of frame and garishly painted.

Raiker led the way across the dance

floor. "I have a nice room at the back." he said.

"No good," said Rosie, looking round her brightly, and quite unconscious of all the eyes upon her: "I want to see what is going on. What about one of those alcoves on the gallery?"

"Just as you wish," said Raiker, and signalled a waiter.

They climbed the stairs. The place was fairly full, but it was a big place and could hold a lot of people without being crowded. Raiker did things in a big way. He had a large staff, and there were plenty of dance girls. Charles also noticed several hard-eyed men leaning casually against the walls, who straightened a little at sight of Raiker. These were presumably gunmen-bouncers, and they were the reason the place was so peaceful at this hour, although there was plenty of noise.

"Quite a place," said Rosie, as they entered an alcove. "You do things in style for the West. Sawdust on the floor, too, instead of sand."

"It's better for dancing," said Raiker, pulling out a chair for her, "and costs very little."

"This place must have cost you something," observed Charles.

"All I had when I came here," said Raiker. "But it has made me a lot since. I guess it is the most popular place in town. With the money I've got from it, I built the Op'ry House, a livery stage, a general store, and a few other places. What are you eating?"

When the waiter had left, Rosie hung over the rail and looked down at the scene below—and it looked back at her. Charles saw Raiker regarding her with undisguised admiration, and he smiled dryly to himself. Raiker was evidently a man who liked to possess things—and Rosie was one of those things. But she was one thing he could never buy, Charles told himself, from what he had seen of Rosie.

"Yep," said Raiker, "I've made myself quite a power in this town."

Rosie glanced at him over her shoulder. "Is that good?" she asked.

Raiker jumped a trifle. "I think so," he said.

"To make money you have to be—well—ruthless, I gather," the girl said.

"Wal," said Raiker slowly, "I wouldn't say that. It is a hard game, gettin' on in the world, and you've got to play the game just a little harder than the other man. You gotta be selfish in this world, otherwise you've got nothing."

"I don't know," said Rosie thoughtfully. "I've battled, too—and I suppose the Doctor has battled to get through his exams and perhaps pay his college fees. Yet I'm quite happy—I'm satisfied with what I've got, and my work hurts nobody. Sometimes it gives a lot of pleasure, and makes people forget the troubles they have been given by some selfish man with money. And the Doctor here. His work is not selfish. He never thinks of the money when he finds some person in agony—he just does his job and is happy to do it. Most doctors are happy, but I never yet saw a country doctor with much money. You see what I mean?"

"I see what you mean," said Raiker slowly. "We're all entitled to our own point o' view."

They ate their supper while Charles, who really preferred to listen, talked about New York. He felt sure Raiker never heard him, for Raiker was watching Rosie. If ever Charles had seen a man smitten hard, it was Raiker. It was not as if the girl had tried to enmesh the saloon-keeper; she seemed to be trying to discourage him. Perhaps that was a new experience to Raiker, and therefore much more novel. She did slight encouragement to Charles, but it was so slight it could hardly be called encouragement. Rosie was always sure of herself, and as direct as her aim with a gun.

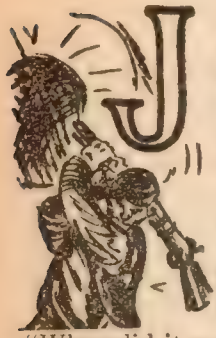
After supper the two men saw her to the door of her room in the Mansion House. It was very late then, and Charles walked down to the front veranda with Raiker. The Mansion House was asleep. The two men smoked their cheroots for a moment in silence.

"Rosie's a great gal!" Raiker said at last. "Wal, I better get some shut-eye. Good night."

"Good night," said Charles, and watched Raiker step out into the dim street.

Then something caught his eye across the road, and he yelled: "Look out!"

4



JOHN RAIKER did not stop to argue. He had been bred in a school of danger. At the yell of warning he dropped flat—as a gun roared and a slug whined its way over his head. Then he was up, a gun in his hand.

"Whar did it come from?" he called.

Charles was already running. "This way," he said, making for a maze of stock corrals which lined the other side of the road. "I saw something move—it caught my eye—then I saw a gleam of light strike steel. Looks like someone wants to drygulch you."

"I'm used to it," grunted Raiker, as they reached the rails of a corral.

They stood there, looking and listening. There was no movement, no sound. Raiker sniffed the smell of gunpowder. The shot must have come from about here, but the shooter had slipped away into the darkness. To try to find him in that maze of yards, where he could slip under rails, would be impossible, and extremely dangerous. Raiker put away his gun.

"Wal," he said, "I guess I owe you some thanks. That hombre had me lined on his sights all right, but your yell upset his aim. I wonder who it was."

Charles was relaxing from the sudden strain. He found ease in facetiousness. "Perhaps it was the same man who shot Dr. Guthrie," he said, with a laugh.

Raiker turned and stared through the darkness. "Mebbe it was," he said, and his voice was deadly serious. "Thanks again, Doc. Now, you watch out he don't get you. He won't be friendly to you after this."

Charles laughed, and they crossed the road. Raiker set off again, and soon the darkness swallowed him up. Charles went inside. A low-turned lamp was burning in the main hall at the foot of the stairs, and his nerves jumped as he saw a figure in white standing on the steps.

It was Caroline, and she was wearing a wrap over a nightgown.

"Is that you, Doctor?" she said, "I—I thought I heard a shot."

"So you did," said Charles. "Some one took a pot shot at Raiker. But they didn't hit him."

"That's a pity!" the girl said bitterly. "I hate that man. I meant to warn you against him, Doctor. It is not good for your position in the town to be seen with him, and—" She paused.

"And you think he makes a habit of killing doctors?"

"Him—or his gunmen, under his orders."

"But why should he want to kill your father? Are you sure he did it?"

"I'm sure."

"Perhaps I can be sure, too, if I make a friend of him. I may be able to learn something for you."

The girl was silent for a moment, turning this over in her mind. "How can you be a friend to him?" she said at last. "You'll be the next. How can you be a friend to him when you are both after the one girl?"

Then she turned and fled up the stairs, and he heard her door slam. He smiled a little to himself, and followed slowly after her.

THE NEXT morning he found Rosie sitting in his waiting room. "Mornin', Doc," she said. "I thought you might have some time for some practice."

"Certainly," said Charles.

They went through the Mansion House, to where there was a large

space of vacant land behind the backyards. It had an occasional tree in it, and upon one of these Rosie pinned a target. She then unbuckled one of her gun belts and showed Charles how to put it on, adjusting it for his greater height, width and reach.

"I can show you only the basic tricks," she said. "After that, it is constant practice to become perfect. That won't come in a week or a month. You will just have to keep at it until the various draws become second nature. In time you will not fumble; the butt of the gun will sort of leap into your palm, the gun will come free without touching, and as you bring it up to a line with your eye you will quite unconsciously thumb back the hammer so that the gun is cocked. Then, when the gun gets on the target, the merest touch of the trigger sends the bullet the right way."

For three solid hours they practised there, with an audience of small boys and a few grown-ups. The fingers of a surgeon are naturally supple and in perfect co-ordination with his brain, so that Charles was a quick learner. Rosie was surprised at his aptitude, and accused him of having had lessons before. He was clumsy at first, and his efforts made her laugh, but after an hour his movements were becoming smoother; in two hours he had acquired a little speed and confidence, but he was still missing the tree; by the end of the third hour he could occasionally hit the tree and his movements had become remarkably fluid.

"It must be nearing lunch," said Rosie. "I think that will be all for today. You have come along remarkably well. Now you keep that gun and belt, and practise whenever you get a chance."

"You mean, to wear it all the time?"

"Why not? You're a man as well as a doctor, and you never know when you'll need it. What if you meet a rattler out on the trail sometime?"

Charles nodded dubiously. "It seems a strange thing for a doctor to wear," he said. "Still, it feels very comforting on the leg. I will buy myself a Colt and a belt this afternoon."

"What's wrong with that gun?" asked Rosie.

"Nothing. It's perfect. But it's yours."

"Not now," said Rosie. "I have a dozen. That one is a bit heavy for me, so I picked it out for you. Take it, as a gift from teacher. And tomorrow morning we'll have our second lesson."

"It is very good of you to give me this gun, but—"

"Forget it. All I can hope is that you don't have to use it to protect yourself. Not for a while, anyhow."

"I could have done with it last night when Raiker and I left you," Charles remarked.

They were on the way back into the house. Rosie paused and looked at him. "You mean that Raiker—"

Charles laughed. "Oh, no, Raiker did nothing. But, just as he was going, I saw a light gleam on a gun barrel in the corrals opposite. I yelled a warning, and he ducked and missed the bullet that was meant for him."

"How did you guess it wasn't meant for you?"

"I never thought of that," said Charles. "Who would want to drygulch me?"

"You never know. Did you get the bushwhacker?"

"No. He had slipped through the corrals."

"It must be terrible to live a life like Raiker," observed Rosie. "He must have made a lot of enemies in his time."

Charles chuckled. "You talked to him like a Dutch uncle last night. And I thought he was going to propose to you."

Rosie smiled dryly. "Raiker isn't my type of man," she said. "Having lunch now?"

"I'd better drop in at the surgery first. Then, I've got to make my rounds."

"Good. I'll borrow a horse and come

with you. I would like to see the country, and I won't be here very long. Oh, by the way, does nursie go on your rounds, too?"

"No."

"Better still. You don't mind?"

"Not at all," said Charles, "but—" He paused.

"You are afraid it might compromise me? Don't worry; we show folks haven't any reputations anyway. Or are you afraid it might compromise you?"

Charles grinned. "I don't mind that," he said.

AN HOUR later Rosie and Charles rode away to the west. Charles had a wide area to cover, although there were not a great many calls, the houses being scattered. Rosie rode beside him, and they laughed and chatted gaily. She was a great companion, Charles thought. She did not try to impress him with her sex.

They reached the furthest farmhouse, drank a julep each from the farmer's stock, and prepared to return. The sun was sliding down the heavens, but they had only a straight ride back, with no calls.

They mounted their horses and started back. After a mile they came to a copse of trees which grew close beside the road for some distance.

"I think I'll stop here and get me a switch," said Rosie. "I didn't bring a quirt, and I lost the switch I had."

"I'll get you one," said Charles.

They stopped in the trees, and Charles dismounted and hunted around for a nice, green, pliant switch. He found one at last, and when he reached the horses again he found Rosie had dismounted. He handed her the switch, and prepared to help her on to her horse.

He didn't know quite how it happened, but it did. Rosie's arms went round his neck, her red hair brushed his face, and then her soft lips were pressing on his mouth. His arms went round her, and he pressed her close, and for a moment he forgot everything but the feel of her lips and her warm body pressed against his own. Suddenly he woke up, and pulled back his head.

"That—that was sudden!" was all he could say.

She laughed softly. "It was nice," she said. "But I shouldn't have done it. You are a baby, Charles. Perhaps that's why I like you so much. But I shouldn't have taken advantage of your innocence. Let's forget it."

She turned and climbed into her saddle, a little smile round her lips. She knew that Charles would not forget it. And she also knew that she was now one jump ahead of his nurse.

Charles mounted his horse, his brain a little confused. They rode on in silence, Rosie giving him plenty of time to think. He needed time to think. He had regarded himself that way. There had been quite a few girls in his life, but they had been commonplace affairs. As a doctor he came in contact with the physical sides of sex, but that was not like this. This red-head was sex incarnate. He could see that now. He realized why the drunks had yelled so loudly for her the night before. She used sex quite calmly as a lure; it was part of her stock-in-trade. And his blood still tingled from that kiss.

It was dark when they reached town. They stabled the horses.

"I'll have to get back to the surgery," he said hurriedly.

She placed her gloved hand on his arm. "I'm sorry, Charles," she said, but there was a laugh in her voice which belied her words.

"What is there to be sorry for?" he asked. "I was glad of your company and—er—everything."

"So was I. It was a nice journey. But I'm afraid I spoiled it. Are you going to the show tonight?"

"I don't know."

"But I will see you in the morning—for practice?"

"Of course."

He hurried away to his office, and she looked after him, wondering if she had acted too quickly. But there was that little nurse, and it was a game of tactics. Perhaps she had used the wrong tactics.

As Charles entered the waiting room he found Caroline standing there, with her hat and cloak on. A farmer was with her.

"This is Mr. Campbell, Doctor." said Caroline, without preamble. "He has ridden in to say his wife is expecting their child at any moment. He has been waiting some time."

"I'll pack a bag," said Charles, forgetting his sex troubles, and becoming the doctor once more.

"I have everything ready," said Caroline. "Including two fresh horses."

"Splendid," said Charles. "We will go at once."

"I have also packed something for you to eat on the way," said Caroline.

"You are a treasure," said Charles. "Let's go."

It was a fast ride through the black night—the farmer leading, Caroline following, and Charles bringing up the rear. Both the farmer and Caroline were better riders than Charles, who was a little saddle-weary from his long ride that afternoon. But the urgency of the case kept him going, and he was the wide-awake, confident doctor when he arrived at the house.

HE DID not relax until the seven-pound baby boy was delivered safe and sound, and resting in its proud mother's arms. Caroline had been as sure as himself, and very efficient. She was experienced in these country confinements, and she was pleased that they had arrived in time, and there had been no complications.

Soon they were riding back toward the town, side by side, and taking it easy.

"Did you strike any trouble this afternoon?" Caroline asked, after they had been cantering for some time in silence.

"Yes—er—no, nothing to speak of," said Charles. "The Johnsons' child seems to be sickening for something—measles, I think, but I couldn't be sure. I will ride out again in a couple of days."

"With her?" blurted Caroline.

"I—er—I beg your pardon?" he asked defensively.

"That show woman!" said Caroline. She had committed herself, so she might as well go on. "She uses her red hair and her glamour like cheese in a rat-trap. Surely you can see that? I suppose she does it in every town she plays."

"I don't think that's fair, and I don't see what business—"

"She's not the type of woman for you. She needs bright lights and saloons and dance halls and—what sort of a wife would she make any man?"

"What is all this talk of Miss Fletcher and wives and—er—things?" said Charles irritably. "What's got into you? I don't think it is part of your duty—"

"It is part of my duty to be a nurse to you as well as the patients," said Caroline. "At least, that's how it seems to me, if you can't look after yourself. Anyone can see she's throwing herself at you—anyone but you. What happened this afternoon?"

"Really, Miss Guthrie," said Charles loftily, "I think you overstep the bounds—I—"

He paused, because Caroline had made a little sound in her throat which sounded like a sob. He fell silent.

"I—I'm sorry!" said Caroline, after a moment. "I'm a fool."

There was a catch in her voice, and she had her head turned away from him, although he could not see her face in the darkness. He reached out and grasped the bridle of her horse and pulled them both to a standstill.

"Are you crying?" he asked.

Caroline couldn't hold it any longer. She started to cry openly.

"Whatever for?" asked Charles.

"Don't take any notice," said Caroline. "It's—it's just temper—that's all."

"But why should you be in a temper?"

"Well—I'm ashamed. I—I—shouldn't have said those things."

He handed her a handkerchief and sat silently by while she cried. He felt rather embarrassed. After a minute or so she sniffed and handed him back the handkerchief. "Thank you," she said. "I'll be all right now. I'm sorry."

"But I still can't understand what you were crying about; in fact, I can't understand the outburst."

She laughed a little. "You great boobie!" she said.

That shook him. "Thank you," he said, with dignity.

She leaned closer and touched his hand. "You might know what makes us tick, but you don't know much about emotions."

They rode on.

"Women are the strangest things," observed Charles.

"Especially jealous women," said Caroline, and once more he was jolted.

He did not get over the shock for half a mile. Then he put out his hand and once more pulled the horses to a standstill.

"What did you mean by that last remark?"

"What remark?" Caroline asked.

"About jealous women."

"Nothing."

"Oh, yes, you did. Did you mean that you were jealous of my attentions to Miss Fletcher?"

"What else could I mean?"

"But why should you be jealous?"

"Please don't make me cry again."

"Heavens, no! But answer my question. You are sort of engaged to Will Fitch, yet you are jealous of me. Why?"

She was silent for a moment. "I am not engaged or betrothed, or anything else, to Will Fitch. He is a nice boy, but that's all I think of him. And if I tell you why I'm jealous of you, will you stop talking about it and forget the whole thing?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, I'll tell you. I've fallen in love with you, fool that I am."

5

FOR THE next three days Charles adopted a pose of austerity with Rosie and Caroline. He was strictly formal to both. Caroline accepted it, rather sadly; Rosie thought it was funny, but she did not laugh openly. Each morning she and Charles did their drawing and target practice, but she did not go riding with him again. She did not ask. She felt, by Charles' present attitude, that she had overstepped the mark. Now she must go carefully. She did not know that her rival had also overstepped the mark, in a different way. Yet time was flying, and she would soon be moving on. She spent most of her spare time with Raiker, much to his pleasure.

Her companionship with Raiker had an effect on the man's personality. He lost some of his hardness, and although he would not admit it openly, he must have admitted to himself that his life had been very selfish. He surprised Charles one afternoon. They met in the street.

"Good day, Mr. Raiker," said the doctor. "I don't know whether you know this or not, but I think I should warn you. I have heard that the Lazy

X boys are raising a crowd to run you out of town."

Raiker shrugged. "I know," he said, with a slight smile. "I'm not worried. We'll give them all they want. But I wanted to see you about something else. It seems to me that this town is growing purty fast, and it should have a hospital. As you are our medical man, I thought I'd see you about it. Now, it will cost money to build, equip and run. I've got a thousand dollars lyin' idle as a start, and I will pay some of the runnin' expenses. If you could get some others in—"

"That's a splendid gesture," said Charles, knowing full well that it must have been Rosie's idea, "and I'll take you up on it. We will want a fair sum to begin with, so I will ask on my rounds of those who might be able to afford it. Such generosity as yours cannot be ignored, and I am sure others will follow suit."

"I hope so," said Raiker. "I've heard tell of a kid who lives in a shack down the river—a kid named Bob Stace, He's purty sick, huh?"

"Pretty sick," said Charles. "Anaemia through lack of proper food. His poorness of blood is affecting his lungs."

"Good food and livin' conditions might make a mighty difference?"

"That is all he needs, really. But his father is a loafer who spends what little money he makes in your saloon."

"Not now he don't. Stace is barred from my saloon. I want that kid to have a fair spin in life. Here's a hundred dollars, and I want you to fix him up—and also tell me of similar cases where money can help."

Charles took the hundred dollar bill, and was so dumbfounded that before he could thank Raiker the town-boss had gone.

The next morning—the fourth after his love embarrassments—he mentioned the occurrence to Rosie during target practice.

Rosie laughed. "Raiker is becoming a philanthropist," she said. "Perhaps he has a conscience after all."

"I shouldn't think so," said Charles. "He is trying to please you, but it may become a habit just the same. You suggested the hospital and Bobbie Stace?"

"Perhaps. Now, see if you can hit the target—you're doing very well today and—"

"Don't change the subject. It is really you who are the philanthropist. Do you do this in every town you visit?"

"Do what?"

"Work on the rich men of the town, and lecture them into being philanthropists."

"Occasionally I have managed to do a bit of good, but I have never worked so hard before. You see, I never thought of it until I fell for a very innocent, good-looking young doctor. So you are really the one that is responsible. By the way, I didn't like to mention it before, but has nursie made that pass at you yet?"

Charles did not answer. He took careful aim at the target, and drilled a hole in its center.

"Now you are trying to change the subject," said Rosie. "I think I am a kind person—"

"You are," said Charles.

"Stop shooting and listen to me," said Rosie. "I like my work, I like travel, I like adulation and the bright lights. It would mean a definite sacrifice for me to give all those things up and become the wife of a country doctor. But I'd do it, and not count it as a sacrifice at all. I've been thinking it all out, and all I want in this world is to marry you. It is the first time in

my life I have ever really been in love."

Charles looked down at his boots, and said never a word.

"Oh, say something!" said Rosie. "I could shake you. Are you in love with nursie?"

Charles shook his head.

"Are you in love with me?" Rosie asked.

Again Charles shook his head.

Rosie sighed. "You'll drive me crazy. How can one attack an entirely negative personality; how can one attack a defenseless man? Do you realise that our extended run here ends in four days, and I will go away?"

"I realise it," said Charles. "I'm sorry, too."

Rosie looked at him narrowly. "Of course, I could marry Raiker," she said.

He nodded, and she ground her teeth.

"I could then stay in town—and still make love to you!"

He looked at her with shocked eyes. "That wouldn't be right," he said.

"Pshaw! All's fair in love and war—especially love. Come on, let's get on with the lesson."

They went on with the lesson. Charles was now very fast on the draw, and quite accurate enough to send a snap shot into a man at twenty paces. He could have held his own with most of the gun-slicks in the town, and Rosie was proud of her teaching.

WHEN HE got back to his surgery, he found Caroline alone. She had attended to what patients had called, and she was always a little sulky after his sessions with Rosie. He did not feel very happy himself.

"Have you had lunch yet?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Do you ever have lunch?" he asked.

She looked at him. "Of course," she said.

"I don't know when you eat it," he remarked. "Come and have lunch now."

"With Miss Fletcher?" she asked.

"No. I don't eat lunch with Miss Fletcher. She lunches with John Raiker."

"And that annoys you, so you want to make her jealous by lunching with me?"

"It does not annoy me at all, and I have no desire to make her jealous," said Charles patiently. "Forget I asked you. I'll eat lunch alone."

"Wait till I take off my uniform," said Caroline, and went into the surgery to do it.

"Damn sex!" said Charles. "Why can't they act like human beings? But perhaps they are! I should have married before I came here—a man isn't safe."

Charles and Caroline lunched in the Mansion House. Fenton passed their table, and paused a moment.

"How's things?" he asked Charles.

"Just the same," said Charles, and Fenton grinned and went on.

The conversation of doctor and nurse was on purely business lines. They talked of cases past and to come. They were just finishing the meal when Will Fitch came into the dining room. He spotted them and crossed to their table.

Will was trying to hide his jealous annoyance.

"I been lookin' for you," he said to Caroline, ignoring the doctor.

"I left a note on the door saying we were lunching," said Caroline.

"I saw it," said Will. "You coulda waited for me—I'd take you to lunch."

"Sit down and order, Will," said Charles. "I asked Miss Guthrie to lunch. I didn't know she had a prior engagement."

"I didn't," said Caroline, curtly.

Will looked at her with hot eyes for a second. Charles felt embarrassed. This was likely to develop into a lovers' quarrel.

"Now, look here, Carrie," said Will at last, "I don't wanta start no trouble—"

"You'd better not!" said Caroline definitely.

That took the wind out of Will's

sails. He dropped in a vacant chair and stared at her. Charles thought it time to change the subject.

"I've learned something about Dr. Guthrie's death," he said.

That interested Will. "You have!" he said.

"Yes. John Raiker told me one night that he knew who killed Miss Guthrie's father. Someone had witnessed the killing, and he told Raiker."

"Who witnessed the shootin'?"

"Raiker wouldn't tell me—neither would he tell me who did the shooting. He said he minds his own business. But I might get it out of him one of these days—or I may find out who the witness was."

Will relaxed. "That don't put us much farther ahead," he said.

"No, but it does mean that two people know who the murderer is, and the truth may come to light."

"I doubt it," said Caroline. "Of course Raiker would not tell you. The witness was one of his gunmen who had done the shooting, and he was simply reporting back to Raiker that his orders had been carried out."

"That may be so—and it may not," said Charles. "Raiker is a strange man, but he does not strike me as a man who would shoot another man in the back—or give orders that way."

Charles smiled. "He offered me one thousand dollars yesterday as the first payment on a new hosptial, and he gave me a hundred dollars to bring Bobbie Stace back to health."

That shocked them. For a moment there was silence.

"His conscience must be hurting him," said Caroline presently.

"I thought you inferred that he didn't have a conscience," said Charles.

Caroline changed the subject. "What puzzles me," she said, "is why anyone should want to kill father. He didn't have an enemy in the town."

"I've thought about that," said Charles. "Here may be one reason, although it is a thin one. A doctor is often given confidences as part of his work. Someone might have been afraid that your father was going to divulge something he was told in confidence."

"Father would never do that."

"Perhaps not, but someone might have been afraid—and fear is a nasty driving force," said Charles.

"Wal, Doc," said Will, "I hope you find out somethin'—it means a lot to me you know. But I'm afraid you won't."

"I'll keep trying," said Charles, and noticed Caroline had averted her head.

A few minutes later the doctor rose.

"I'm going back to the surgery," he said. "You two will have private things to talk about."

"We haven't," said Caroline. "I'll come with you."

"Now, Carrie—" protested Will.

But Caroline had made up her mind. She and the doctor went back to the surgery, leaving Will to eat his lunch alone.

CHARLES was walking along the veranda of the Mansion House en route to the surgery. The night was quite dark, but lamps hung along the porch, so that the doctor was in plain view. The other side of the road was in complete darkness, the cattle yards stretching away into the darkness.

Suddenly a shot roared on the still air, and Charles felt the wind of a bullet pass his nose—also its deathly whine before it thudded into the wall of the house. His medical training had fitted him for quick action, but for a moment he was stunned. Then he swung round, drawing his gun as he did so, and falling into a crouch. He felt sure that the shot had come from the corrals—from the same position that someone had fired on Raiker. He threw a shot in that direction, and commenced a zig-zag run, firing as he went.

A hubbub broke out in the Mansion House, as it was early evening, and the dining room was full.

Charles reached the first corral and paused, gun in hand, peering into the darkness. Nothing moved, but there was the sound of a rail slipping a little

some distance away. The yards were empty of cattle, so the doctor threw a shot in that direction, expecting a reply. None came.

The mysterious dry-gulcher had again made good his escape.

Charles found people close behind him, and he turned and saw there was also a crowd on the veranda. Fenton touched his elbow.

"What's all the shootin'?" Fenton asked.

"Someone fired a shot at me as I was walking along the veranda," said Charles. "I think he was hidden here. I fired back, but I don't think I hit him. I couldn't see anything to fire at."

"Why should he fire at you?" asked Fenton.

Charles shrugged. "Heaven knows!" he said. "He might have mistaken me for someone else."

"But you would be plain in the light."

"Perhaps he is a slug-scattering lunatic."

Caroline pushed through the crowd. From another direction Charles saw Rosie coming. He groaned a little.

"Are you hurt?" Caroline asked anxiously.

"No," said Charles. "He missed me."

"Are you sure?" asked Rosie, and Caroline turned and glared at her.

Fenton stepped back, grinning.

"Of course I'm sure!" said Charles snappily. "He only fired once. The slug hit the wall."

He pushed his way through the crowd, the girls falling in each side of him.

"One of Raiker's men, I suppose," said Caroline meaningly. "He must be jealous."

"It might be some other jealous suitor," said Rosie, not to be outdone. "You shouldn't be mixed up with so many women, Charles."

Caroline stiffened at Rosie calling the doctor "Charles," and Charles felt more annoyed than ever.

"I wish to heavens I wasn't," he said. "Now I'm going to my room. Good night."

He ran up the stairs. Caroline looked at Rosie coldly. Rosie replied with a sneering smile.

The women, who really had one thing in common, parted and went their ways.

6

IT WAS Saturday night when hell broke loose in Tucson. The town had been quieter than usual all day, and many people felt, and others knew, that something was in the air. John Raiker had many enemies in the town, and these moved around tight-lipped. Some hated him because of his success; some hated him because he barred them from his establishments; some hated him because of real or fancied wrongs. Every single one of these, it would seem, had joined the secret force of self-styled Vigilantes, who purposed driving Raiker out of town—or burying him.

The usual honest people of the town were worried. They took no sides, but they knew that during trouble, innocent bystanders were often hurt, fires were lit, and the property of the innocent and law-abiding suffered. So these people were off the streets early. They went to their homes—and stayed there.

For this reason Wolffe's Wild West Troupe had a poor house, and there were only a dozen or so cold-eyed men in the *Oriental Saloon*. One or two of the Lazy X boys had been seen in town during the day, but they had vanished now.

About half-past eight Charles and Caroline were sitting in his surgery talking about the matter.

"It's all because of that woman," said Caroline. "If she had never come

to Toos'n, none of this would have happened."

"That's not fair," said Charles, with a smile. "This trouble is of long-standing. The Lazy X and Raiker have been at daggers drawn for months, they tell me. The trouble was sure to flare up some day. I wish it was over. I'm afraid we are likely to have a lot of work this night, and very little sleep."

"I'm ready," said Caroline. "I have laid everything out and—"

The door opened suddenly and Sam Hamilton stood there. His right hand was still in bandages—rather dirty—and he was drunk.

"What side are you on, Doc?" he said, without preamble.

"A doctor never takes sides," said Charles. "He helps the injured, no matter which side they are on."

"You're wearin' a gun," pointed out Sam.

"I may need it," said Charles. "Last night someone took a pot shot at me from the dark. It wasn't you, was it?"

Sam shook his head. "I can only fire properly with the right hand," he said, "and that ain't workin'. And I ain't no dry-gulcher. I might be a soak and a lotta other things, but I ain't no dry-gulcher. Wal, be seein' ya, Doc."

He staggered away.

"I don't like that man," said Caroline. "He's dangerous."

Charles smiled. "I don't think so," he said. "He is just a fool for alcohol—and that makes him a fool for most things. But I think he is all right deep down."

"You are too trusting," said Caroline.

"As a doctor I should not trust my instincts, but I do. I find them very helpful."

Caroline sniffed, and wondered how things were going up at the Opera House.

The show lacked sparkle, which was to be expected. No one seemed to have much heart in his work, and all seemed to be waiting for something to happen. Raiker was in his usual place in a front seat, flanked and surrounded by about a dozen of his gunmen. At the front door, the side exit doors, and the rear stage door, other gunmen were posted. Also, to prevent a surprise attack, scouts had been placed at the outskirts of the town.

It was about nine o'clock when one of these scouts rode furiously into town. He pulled up in a cloud of dust outside the Opera House. Red Cotter stepped out of the porch.

"They're comin," gasped the scout. "They're comin'."

"How many?" asked Cotter.

"About a hundred—wearing masks like a lynchin' party. Better get Raiker under cover."

"He won't go into hidin'," growled Cotter. "Ride on and warn the boys at the *Oriental*."

The scout put spurs to his horse, and Cotter sent word inside to his boss. Rosie had just come on the stage, and she saw the messenger whispering in Raiker's ear.

Raiker nodded and stood up. He clambered on to the stage. "Folks," he said. "The Vigilantes are just enterin' town. You people who don't wanta be in the fight had better make for home, pronto—also you show folk. This place ain't gonna be healthy. Put out the lights, boys."

Many people left the hall; also many of the show troupe made for the Mansion House, not even troubling to take off their make-up. Rosie was not one of them.

"I'll stay—and fight!' she said.

"This ain't no game for a woman—especially a lovely one. There won't be any sense in these Vigilantes—they are out to kill and burn and pillage—in the name of law and order. Queer, ain't it? Unfortunate, too, because many good men are likely to die tonight," Raiker said.

"Including you," said Rosie, from the growing darkness, as light after light was blown out.

"Including me," said Raiker quietly. He turned to his generalship. "Cover the doors and windows, lads, also bar

the doors in case they make a rush. Everybody ready."

A chorus came back to him, and then silence fell. The defenders waited in the darkness.

SUDDENLY a whisper ran through the hall. A crowd of horsemen had been seen in the moonlight approaching from each end of the street, another bunch had been seen coming along the street which started opposite the Opera House, and presumably a fourth party was coming up from the rear. The handful of men in the hall tightened their chins and cocked their guns.

Bernard Wolffe, the proprietor of the troupe, had stayed to protect his properties in case of fire or pillage, and he was armed with a shotgun. Crackers, the drawling comedian, had stayed for "the hell of it."

"There will be a lot o' publicity about this night in Toos'n," he drawled. "I might as well be in it—I'd hate to miss out on any publicity."

"Don't fire until they fire," Raiker told his men.

Silence fell again. It was a deep silence. All sound in the town had stopped; the saloons had closed their doors and boarded up their windows. All other business houses had also closed, and lights had been put out. The town was as dark and silent as the hour before dawn. It seemed to be waiting with bated breath. There was a full moon shining over the unlit town, and very little breeze, so that when a voice spoke it was heard clearly for a long distance.

Only one light shone in the whole town. and that was so small as to be hardly noticeable. It was in the surgery of Dr. Charles Bowman.

Charles and Caroline had gone out on to the veranda of the Mansion House. Others were there also. They could see along the long street to where the Opera House crouched in the darkness. They could see further to the more ornate structure of the *Oriental.* They could also see horsemen riding

carefully, and men on foot slipping into positions round the Opera House.

And they heard clearly some shouted words from a man outside. He was somewhere across the street, out of sight.

"Whar's John Raiker?" were the words.

"That's Jake, of the Lazy X," remarked Fenton.

Before another voice could speak, a figure on a horse came out of the wide doors of the dark livery stable, and rode up the street before the Opera House.

"Who in hell is that?" said Fenton. "He shore is plumb crazy! He is likely to get mowed down by either side."

The horseman stopped in the center of the road outside the Opera House.

"Boys," shouted the rider, "this is Sheriff Ralph Parsons talkin'. You all know me. I'm easy-goin'—up to a pinch. And the pinch has come."

"Wal, what you know!" ejaculated Fenton. "I'd forgot all about the sheriff!"

"I represent law and order in this town," went on the sheriff, "and I mean to keep it to the best o' my ability. In fact, I'm willin' to kill any man who breaks it. You fools who come ridin' into town in masks—I know every gol-darned one of you, so the masks ain't a bitta use. I been busy these last few days, and so has my depitties. If a shot is fired here tonight; if anythin' happens which is

agin the law, I will have every manjack of the eighty-eight o' you throwed into jail—and I mean it. Some of you might even swing, if someone dies. I might mention somethin' else. I've sent to the fort as Casa Grande for a troop of cavalry, and they must be nearly here. So you see what you're up against. You thought you had the numbers in your favor, but you won't have. This won't be any picnic of murder and pillage. You are likely to die. So go home while you got life in your bodies, and give the whole thing up. That's all I gotta say."

A breath stirred through the listening town; a breath which had been held the better to hear his words.

"Good old Parsons!" said Fenton softly to the others on his veranda. "He's a good man. I wondered why he had been so quiet lately. He was layin' his plans, too—and they shore musta throwed a shock into Jake and his friends."

"Do you think they will go home?" asked Caroline.

"That's hard to tell," said Fenton. "Those guys was set on some fun, though most of 'em is law-abidin' as a rule."

The sheriff was still sitting his horse, plain in the moonlight.

"You keep out o' this, sheriff," yelled a voice. "If you'd done your dooty, Raiker woulda bin run outta town long since. We ain't gonna hurt anyone, but we's gettin' rid o' Raiker."

"You talk rot, Jake," said the sheriff. "You know as wal as I do that you can't get rid o' Raiker without bloodshed. If Raiker had broke the law o' this town, I woulda dealt with him, but he ain't—and thar's no law to say a man shouldn't defend himself."

"You're on his side!" yelled another voice. "How much does he pay you?"

The sheriff disdained to answer that. He slowly turned his horse. He had had his say. He commenced to slowly ride along the deserted street.

Suddenly the silence was shattered by a gunshot. The sheriff reeled in his saddle, then slowly slipped to the ground. His horse stopped, turned, and nuzzled his still figure.

"Whar did that shot come from?" said Fenton.

"It seemed to come from the corrals," said Caroline, and then started off after Charles, who was running as fast as he could toward the sheriff.

The shot and the fall of the sheriff had shocked both sides into silent inaction. Now all eyes were on the running doctor, with the girl some distance behind him.

Charles made a good moving target, but he never thought of that. He was intent on reaching the sheriff and saving his life if possible.

Jake, crouched in the darkness of a corral near a barn opposite the Opera House, whispered to a man near him: "Who's that runnin'?"

"Looks like the young Doc."

"The young Doc!" said Jake. "He's a friend o' Raiker's. He fought for him that night. Blast him!"

He raised his gun, but his friend pushed it up. "Don't be a fool!" he said. "He's a doctor, and we're like to need a leech afore this night is finished."

IN SILENCE Charles reached the side of the sheriff and bent over him. The man was still breathing, but unconscious. The bullet had entered his chest, and he was bleeding freely. The doctor took off the sheriff's bandana, and made a pack for the wound, working quickly. By the time he had slightly arrested the flow of blood, Caroline arrived.

"Help me get him on to the horse," said Charles, not wondering at the moment about the girl's presence. "You hold the bridle—I can lift him."

The girl obeyed without comment; her white uniform standing out clearly in the moonlight. Charles gathered the sheriff up carefully in his arms, and placed him in the saddle.

"Lead the horse to the surgery," he said. "I'll hold him on."

The little party set off slowly along

the street. The town was silent again—trying to make up its mind, or awaiting events.

They reached the surgery without incident, and there Charles ripped open the lawman's shirt. The surgery light was still the only one in town; the surgery was the only place where a "Business as usual" sign could have been hung out.

Jake started to yell again.

"Whar is Raiker?" he shouted.

"I'm here!" called back Raiker's voice from the Opera House.

"One of your boys shot the sheriff, Raiker," accused Jake.

"That's a lie!" said Raiker. "My boys have orders not to fire till I say so. And my boys are trained to obey orders!"

"Wal, someone shot the sheriff," yelled Jake, "and you see what can happen if you don't listen to reason. You come out here with your hands up and you won't be hurt. You'll be taken a couple of miles outta town and told to ride—and not come back. That's all we want. You can save a lotta trouble by doin' that."

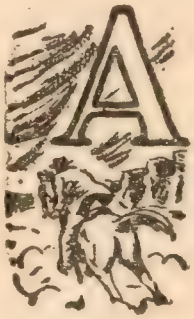
"That's only blackmail," said Raiker, "and I couldn't trust men who would shoot the sheriff from the dark. Besides, I got property in this town and I'm a law-abidin' citizen. Why should I go just because a few no-good hombres don't like me? Take your coyotes home and tell them to yelp after some other prey."

"All right," said Jake, with finality. "If you won't come out, we'll come and get you—from all sides. I ain't believin' the sheriff's bluff about the cavalry, and you needn't, either. Ready, Raiker? 'Cos, here we come!"

He raised a sixgun into the air and fired three shots, the signal for all four parties to close in.

Red Cotter, in the Opera House, had been trying to place Jake's position by his voice, and then the flare of the three shots showed that position up clearly. Red took aim and fired—and Jake fell with a bullet through his brain, and died without striking a blow in the war he had instigated.

7



A FUSILADE of shots came from opposite the Opera House, and slugs thudded into the timber walls and sent windows smashing. Raiker's men fired back at the flashes — carefully and coolly. Although Raiker's party was outnumbered, he had the better fighters. On his side were men who lived by the gun; on the other side were farmers and cattlemen, who seldom used a gun.

Down the street from the left swept about twenty horsemen. They careened past the Opera House, pouring bullets into it as they went. Three dropped from their saddles and hit the dust. One of these crawled weakly across the road and out of sight; the others lay still.

The riders turned at the end of town and came riding back. An attack had begun on the back of the Opera House from the barns situated there, but Raiker had six good men placed at the rear of the hall, and they were keeping their end up.

Down swept the riders again, pouring out lead as they passed the hall. Four more saddles were emptied by the marksmen inside.

Rosie was firing through a broken front window. "That makes two," she said. "One coming and one going. I shot one in the shoulder and one in the leg."

"Shoot to kill," rasped Cotter.

"No need," said Rosie. "I can shoot better than that."

Down in the surgery Charles had extracted the slug from the sheriff's chest. It had struck him a glancing blow, broken a rib, and torn some flesh, but done no serious damage. The most

serious thing about it was that the angle showed there could be no doubt that it was fired from the corrals.

When the firing broke out, Charles was busy working. He finished the main task, and then handed over to Caroline. "You take over," he said. "There must be some more now. I must go and get them."

"Don't be loco," said a deputy-sheriff. "You can't go out in that rain o' lead."

"Someone has to if lives have to be saved," said Charles. "No one will shoot me."

He ran out into the road. The night was stabbed with gunpowder flashes from the corrals and the Opera House. Lead was whining across the moonlit road. Several men lay in the dust.

Charles started up the road in a crouching run. The din and the shooting stopped for a moment, while the combatants wondered what fool was moving about in that screen of death.

"It's the Doc!" roared a voice in the corrals. "Hold your fire."

Shooting stopped on both sides, and Charles reached the figures in the dust. The firing at the back of the hall continued unabated.

Charles bent over one man who was moving.

"I've got it in the leg," said the man. "I ain't hurt bad, but I can't move. Try some o' the others—they might be worse."

"I'll carry you to the surgery first," said Charles, lifting the man up and throwing him across his shoulder.

"What's he doin'?" said Red Cotter inside the hall. "Helping the enemy? I should send a slug into him."

"You do and I'll send two slugs into you," said Rosie definitely.

"Huh?" exclaimed Red.

"Lay off, Red," said Raiker's voice. "Bowman is doing a humane job—he is not taking sides. He would do as much for you. I never thought he had the spunk to run into that hail of lead."

"I don't suppose he thought about the danger," Rosie remarked. "He thinks about nothing but his doctoring—worse luck!"

Raiker laughed softly.

Charles was half-way to the surgery, and the shooting was still silent, the besiegers giving him plenty of leeway, because they recognized he was helping one of themselves, although he was supposed to be a friend of Raiker.

Sharp on the night air sounded one shot. Charles dropped, taking the wounded man with him. An uproar of sound broke out, but it was not shooting. It was a roar of indignation.

"Who fired that shot?" yelled one of the Lazy X hands. "What rotten coyote fired that shot?"

"It came from the corrals near me," yelled another voice. "Wait till I find the skunk. I'm not fightin' on the side of such a rattlesnake."

There was a bustle of sound in the corrals. In the center of the road lay Charles and the wounded man. Someone in white was running along the road from the surgery.

"He's gone!" yelled a voice from the corrals. "I saw the flash, and it came from here. But he's slipped away into the dark. I wish I had him lined up in my sights."

The white figure of Caroline reached the two men in the road.

She was vastly surprised when Charles snapped: "Keep down. You should not have come here."

"Where are you hit?" Caroline asked, tears in her voice.

"Nowhere!" said Charles. "I heard the shot and guessed it was meant for me, so I dropped. I didn't even hear the bullet. That fellow can't shoot for apples. But this might cause the battle to end, don't you see!"

"I see," said Caroline, feeling relieved, and slightly foolish. "But men are coming out to get you. We had better hurry away. Lean on me as though you are hit."

CHARLES climbed up with her assistance, the wounded man still on his shoulder. They set off down the road; he staggering a little to give the impression he was wounded.

A cheer went up from both sides of the road. Charles grinned. "You see," he whispered to Caroline, "they have one thing in common now."

"They might have," she snapped, "but you gave me a terrible scare. I was just finishing up the sheriff when they told me you had been shot. I thought you were dead. I wonder what idiot fired."

"It seems to be narrowing down," panted Charles. "I have had all sorts of suspicions, but it is narrowing down."

"You mean Sam Hamilton? But he said he couldn't shoot with his left hand."

"So he said. And that drygulcher isn't the best shot in the world. Why, even I could hit a man travelling slowly ten paces away."

"But they tell me you are a good shot," said Caroline.

Charles let that go, not wishing to start an argument which might bring in Rosie. They reached the Mansion House, and many hands helped them into the surgery. There Charles lay the wounded man on the table and straightened up.

"Whar did they hit you, Doc?" asked Fenton.

"Never touched me," said Charles. "He did his own cause more harm than me. Listen, there hasn't been a shot since. I'd better go out and get those others."

"But you're supposed to be wounded," said Fenton.

"Nurse, wrap a bandage round my head—quickly," said Charles.

"But someone is waiting to get you —out there!" she protested.

"I don't think he will dare to fire again," said Charles, "and it has to be done. I'm safe enough."

Much argument was going on in the Vigilantes' camp. Many of them wanted to give up the whole affair and go home. The action of the drygulcher had disgusted them. Other stouter figures wanted to go on with the fight until they had won the battle. In the meantime, Charles was working over the wounded man and getting him ready for Caroline to continue the job.

Messages were sent to the other Vigilante parties, and the leaders were called to a pow-wow. This might have ended the war had it not been for Raiker.

"Jake!" he yelled out.

"Jake is dead!" a voice yelled back.

"Who is in charge?" yelled Raiker. "Did Jake get shot in the back by one of your own crowd? What sort of men are you who shoot sheriffs and doctors?"

"We'll show you what sorta men we are!" yelled the voice in anger. "Carry on the fight, boys! We'll shift Raiker or die."

The shooting broke out again just as Charles came loping up the center of the road, his white bandage clear.

"Hold it!" yelled voices on both voices, and the shots dribbled off.

The horsemen at each end had given up the sallies. They were too costly. Charles pretended to be a little weak on his feet as he ran. He reached a man. The man was dead. He went on to another. That man was also dead. The third man was alive, and a bullet had broken his collarbone. Charles lifted him carefully. It would be dangerous to put the man over his shoulder, so he carried him in his arms like a baby, a far harder way to carry such a heavy weight.

He had to set the man down several times on the journey, but no shot was fired this time. It struck Charles that

his journeys were holding up the battle considerably and, if the sheriff had been speaking the truth, he might be able to stall off the fighting until the cavalry arrived. He did not know then that the Vigilantes were making good use of this lull. They were getting ready a new plan.

Charles had almost reached the surgery when two shots were fired and then, like a horde of whooping Indians, men ran from the corrals and barns, down the street and at the back, in a concerted charge on foot.

They met a lot of lead and several fell, but there were too many of them. About fifteen reached the back, while others were trying to batter in the side windows and exit doors.

The crowd inside poured out shots and the besiegers poured them in, doing some damage and bringing down some of Raiker's few men. The doors were barricaded with piled chairs, but they could not hold for long.

Then out from the *Oriental Saloon* poured the rest of Raiker's gang, shooting along the street and mowing down those crouched against the building. The besiegers broke and fled, and Raiker's men turned into the side alley, pouring lead into it and receiving lead in return. The men at the back drew off.

The attackers fled, and Raiker's men ran back toward the *Oriental,* some of them falling on the way.

The sortie had been a brisk and deadly one, and men were scattered all over the road, upon the porch of the hall, along the side of it and at the back, as well as inside.

Charles came running up the road again.

"Stand back, Doc," yelled a voice. "We just started somethin' and we aim to finish it."

"I won't stand back," yelled Charles. "I've got a job to do, too—and I'll do it."

AT THAT moment he realised why the besiegers did not want him to hold up proceedings. The back of the Opera House was on fire! The attackers had lit it during the foray. And for the crowd in the hall to fight the flames they would have to show themselves—and be shot.

"You fools!" yelled Charles. "I thought you were human. Wounded men will be roasted—your men as well as the other side. Let me have an armistice while I get men to help me rescue them."

"Not much, Doc!" yelled a Vigilante. "We got 'em now!"

Charles ran around the side of the building, stepping over bodies of sprawled men. He reached the back. The flames were licking hungrily up the timber, and he was plain in the glare. A gun roared, and a bullet chipped the wall beside him.

"Hold it!" roared a voice. "It's the leech!"

Charles ran along the back of the building. Five men were scattered over the ground, two of them on the step of the stage door. He made quick examinations of all five, his work being made easier by the light. Two of the men were dead, the other three were wounded, one very seriously. Charles dragged the wounded men clear of the flames, and began to plug their wounds. All firing had stopped here, and he knew the crowd inside would be saturating the timber from the interior, for the tanks had pipes running into the dressing rooms. And none of the Vigilantes had yet thought to send a few shots into the tanks, because the ground was dry around them. If the defenders could get the timber well soaked from inside they would slow up the fire. But they were in a nasty position.

Charles stood up from his work and looked toward the barns. He could see eyes and gun barrels gleaming in the firelight.

"You are trying to burn a woman alive in there," he said.

"What woman?" a voice called.

"Rosie Fletcher."

"The flames will go with her red hair," said a man, and there was a

laugh. "I bet she's usin' her guns on us."

"I'll wager it's not to kill," yelled Charles, "and she is one who could kill if she wished. All right, her murder is upon your heads."

He started to drag the wounded men toward the barns.

"Don't come too close, Doc," warned a Vigilante. "And don't try no tricks."

"I'm not trying any tricks," grunted Charles. "I want to get these men into your charge. I can't carry them to the surgery, and there's no hospital. Raiker was going to build one—but he can't do it if he's dead. Here, I'll leave this one behind this barn. You can attend him there."

"What's that about Raiker building a hospital?" asked a man.

"He intended to put a thousand toward it. He gave me a hundred yesterday to make little Bobbie Stace well. Still, some one doesn't like him, so you had better kill him."

He could hear the men whispering as he dragged the second man into shelter. One approached him.

"Is that true about Raiker and young Bobbie?" he asked.

"Why not run down to Stace's and verify it?" panted the doctor. "I took him down good food, and I'm sending him away to a better climate. Now I'm going to fight that fire—and you can shoot me if you wish."

"I ain't gonna shoot you," drawled one man. "I'm gonna help you."

Charles was dragging in the third man. He rose. He knew he was in plain view and hearing of the defenders inside.

"Don't shoot!" he yelled. "We are going to put out the fire." He turned round to the Vigilantes. "Any man who is going to help me, come on—but come unarmed. Right."

He dashed for a bucket which stood under one of the tanks. He started to fill it, then found two men beside him.

"Too slow," said the man. "Here, let me show you."

The flames had got a good grip a few feet from the tank. The man turned the tap on full, placed his hand beneath it and expertly squirted a stream of water right into the seat of the fire.

There were two tanks, but the other one could not be used for squirting purposes, so Charles took his bucket there. He returned to dash the water on the fire, then was replaced by another man who had found a large dish.

"I set this fire," said the man who was squirting. "I never knoo I'd be tryin' to put it out."

It was desperate work for fifteen minutes, and then the flames flickered out, leaving the darkness. The quenching was helped a great deal by the saturating the timber had got from within. The Vigilantes ran back into cover, but they did not recommence shooting.

Charles went into the side alley and began feeling his way among the men lying there. The shooting which had been going on intermittently in the front of the building had stopped, and Charles wondered at that, not knowing the whisper had gone round of Raiker's hospital offer and his kindness to Bobbie Stace.

And as Charles worked in the dark he heard his name called.

"Charles! Charles!"

It was Caroline's voice, and it was agonised. She had never called him by his Christian name before, and somehow it thrilled him.

"Oh, Charles—where are you?"

He ran along the alley to the front and saw her turning over the bodies

of the men and looking into their faces. The moon had passed over, but this side was still fairly bright, and her white uniform made her conspicuous. He thought this was the reason for the cessation of shooting.

"I am here!" he said.

She straightened up, saw him, and ran to him. She threw her arms round him, sobbing in her relief. He felt rather embarrassed, but her concern was very flattering—and her young body was very soft, too.

At that moment the notes of a bugle sounding the "Charge!" pierced the night. backed by the clatter of many horsemen.

8

THE BATTLE of Tucson was over!

The Vigilantes heard the cavalry coming, and they made themselves scarce, running for their horses, leaping into the saddle and spurring away madly for their homes. Some did not wait to find their own horses, grabbing any saddle animal. but there were plenty to go round, for many men would never ride again.

Charles held Caroline in his arms. while she cried on the front of his shirt. He thought it better that she should relieve the late strain by giving vent to her emotion. In the meantime he simply held her close. He had also relaxed. There was no need for him t be the doctor at the moment, disregarding self for service to others. He could think of himself, and he was; he was savouring this small bundle of female in his arms, and finding it quite comforting. It did not have the thrill of Rosie's embrace—it did not even have the sex—but there was a warmness, a comfort in it.

He looked down at the dark hair as the cavalry thundered past. Caroline had stopped crying. Suddenly she looked up, stood on tip-toe and pressed her lips to his. It was a warm kiss salted with her tears; again he was not thrilled, but he thoroughly enjoyed the comfort it gave him.

A cheer came from inside the Opera House and brought him to himself. They would be streaming out soon and there was yet much to be done.

"We have a lot of work to do," he said to Caroline softly. "So many men require our aid. Let us get to it."

She nodded and sniffed. Cautious lights were springing up all over town; the lamps were being lit in the Opera House. The doctor and the nurse stepped out on the road and began their work again.

The cavalry came cantering back, led by a young lieutenant with large sideburns. Most luxuriant whiskers they were, black and curly. As he reached Charles the last barrier fell from the Opera House door and people came forth, led by Rosie.

The lieutenant pulled up his horse near Charles. "I am Lieutenant Gresham, U.S. Cavalry," he said, saluting smartly. "Can you direct me to Ralph Parsons, marshal of this town?"

Charles stood up. "You will find him in my surgery—I am Dr. Bowman, Lieutenant. Along there at the Mansion House."

Gresham looked round at the scattered bodies. "It seems we arrived a little late," he said. "Thank you, Doctor."

He rode on, leading his troop, who looked very dusty and weary.

Charles found Rosie beside him. She was staring at the bandage round his head.

"Oh, Charles!" she said. "They wounded you."

Charles remembered the bandage. and tore it off. "A mere subterfuge!" he said, with a grin. "Have you many casualties in there?"

"Four. Two dead and two wounded. You've sure made a hero of yourself this night, Charles. You'll be the most popular man in town—with all parties. And your little nurse! She is a heroine if ever I saw one. I wouldn't have been game to disregard those flying bullets—I know what they can do."

Caroline was busy working over a wounded man. She did not look up at

the words of praise. Raiker came up. "Thar seems to have been a lotta damage. We had better organise things," he said.

"Could we use the *Oriental* as a hospital?" asked Charles.

"Shore. I'll get some beds down from upstairs, and put 'em in the bar."

"Why carry the wounded men up there?" asked Rosie. "Why not bring mattresses down here and use the Opera House as a hospital—clear out the chairs if you haven't enough room on the stage."

"That's the best suggestion so far," said Charles.

"I'll see to it," said Raiker, and set about marshalling his men as mattress carriers.

The darkened houses and business places of the town slowly grew into light, and the inhabitants gradually filtered out into the open road. Rosie took on the task of putting them to work. She knew nothing about nursing, but she could get things done. She found the people who could be useful, and she gave them tasks best suited to their abilities.

Lieutenant Gresham also detailed a couple of files of men to assist the wounded. The Opera House was brilliantly lit, the mattresses laid out, and the twenty-one wounded men laid upon them. Eleven men had died that night outright, and four or five of the wounded were not expected to live. It had been a very hot little war while it lasted.

Sheriff Parsons was fit enough to sit up and talk to the lieutenant, although the sheriff did not know a great deal about the affair. The deputies and other people filled in with the details. Charles was far too busy to talk to them. He and Caroline worked at top speed attending to the wounded. The entertainment theatre had become an operating theatre.

Dawn came, and found them still working at top pressure trying to save the lives of the dangerously wounded men.

Bernard Wolffe stood in the center of the stage and looked round at the scene. "I never thought I'd ever stage a show like this," he said. "You never put on a more realistic one," remarked Crackers. "And think of the publicity. All over the country they'll be talking about the war in Toos'n and the part Wolffe's Wild West Troupe played in it."

Wolffe grunted. "I prefer my West a little less wild," he said. "We'll lose money now with no show tonight."

"Lose money, you skinflint!" said Crackers. "We've made a pile already —and you'll make a bigger pile from this."

Rosie turned herself into a nurse and worked as hard as the doctor and Caroline, if not so effectively. Occasionally she had to come into contact with Caroline, but they did not say any more words than were absolutely necessary.

About eight o'clock Rosie went along to the *Oriental*, and returned with a couple of waiters and breakfast for Charles and Caroline. Then she went and had her own. Realising that they must keep their strength up, Charles made Caroline eat, and also sat down for a moment himself.

THEY WERE seated at the back of the hall near the door. Occasionally a groan came to them from a patient, but most of their assistants had also gone to breakfast. A figure showed in the doorway, and Charles looked up.

Sam Hamilton was standing there. He looked more unkempt than usual his battered hat was crushed, there was straw in his hair, and his eyes were bleary. He was not drunk, but he had to cling to the door frame to keep steady. He looked about the place.

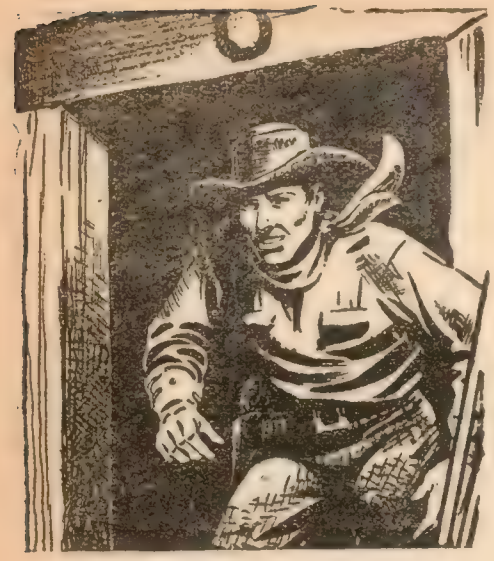
"Looks like thar was a battle after all," he said thickly. "And I missed it."

Charles looked at him, his spine prickling a little. He forced his voice to keep calm.

"Where were you?" he asked.

"Asleep, I guess," said Sam.

"Asleep!" said Charles incredulously. "How could you sleep through that?"



"I did," said Sam. "I drank a quart of forty-rod—and when I woke up I was lyin' in a hay-barn."

"Where?"

"In a hay barn in the cattle yards. I usually sleep in the corrals. No one disturbs you thar, and the hay is soft and warm. Whar is Raiker?"

"At the *Oriental,* I think. Why?"

"I wanta drink—bad! Who won the battle? Raiker must have if he's still alive."

"Whose side are you on?" asked Charles.

Sam stared at him. "Raiker's, o' course," he said. "Who else? Ain't John Raiker my pard? I used to work for him, but I hit the likker too hard, so he—sorta pensioned me off. He gives me all the grog I want and a few dollars."

"And what do you do in return?" asked Charles.

"Nothin'," said Sam. "Wal, I better go find Raiker. I need somethin' for my head. My hand is painin', too."

"Let me have a look at it," said Charles.

"Forgit it," said Sam, and went out again.

For a moment the doctor and nurse were silent.

"I'll tell you what Hamilton does for Raiker," said Caroline presently. "He lies in those corrals at night all right, but he is not asleep. He lies there to shoot people that Raiker wants shot—such as my father and you. Raiker isn't the type of man to give away liquor and money for nothing."

"I'm not so sure," said Charles. "He mentioned to me once that he keeps a lot of bums. He is a peculiar man, and I think he has a lot of good mixed with the bad in his make-up."

She snorted in most unladylike manner. "It hurts me when you take his side," she said.

"I'm not taking his side, but I like to be fair. Sam may have been telling the truth. Raiker may have really given him a quart of forty-rod, knowing he could not forbear drinking it, and therefore would become incapable of getting mixed up in the fight. Besides, the drygulcher once tried to shoot Raiker."

Caroline sniffed. "But he didn't hit him!"

"I warned him."

"It might have been all carefully staged for your benefit, to throw suspicion from Raiker. Raiker has told you himself that he knows who the drygulcher is—or he thinks he knows. Then, why doesn't he—or his gunmen—do something about it?"

Charles nodded slowly. "That is strange," he said. "Well, I must get back to work. You take a little longer rest."

"I don't need rest," said Caroline.

"You do," said Charles. "You are not as strong as I am."

"Who said so? Women can last longer than men when it comes to sustained effort."

"And then collapse harder," he said dryly, as he went to wash his hands.

LATER ON in the morning, the sheriff was helped in by two of his deputies, who were almost carrying him. His face was pale, but his eyes were bright. The doctor hurried to him.

"You should not have come here," said Charles. "You should be resting. We don't want any complications with

that wound, and you must give that broken rib a chance to knit."

"Wal, you ain't got time to come to me, so I thought I'd come to you," said the sheriff. "I wanted to thank you f'r bringin' me in last night. That was shore a plucked thing to do."

"Nonsense!" said Charles. "It wasn't half as plucky as your riding out there to stop the fight. I never thought of being shot, so I was not plucky at all. I suppose if I had stopped to think of it, I would have left you there."

"Not you," said Parsons. "I owe Carrie Guthrie a heap o' thanks, too. But what's the use—what can a man say in change for his life?"

They had been making the sheriff comfortable upon a mattress.

"You know," said Charles, as he adjusted a pillow, "I think you would have prevented that fight if it had not been for the man who shot you. Their blood was hot, but you cooled it. That did not suit someone; someone who desperately wanted Raiker to be killed or run out of town. That is why you were shot, I think."

"I reasoned it out thataways, too," said Parsons. "And that guy don't love you, neither. I hear he took a shot at you when you was bringin' in one o' the Vigilantes."

"It may not have been the same man," said Charles, "though I think it was. Whoever he is, he is a coward who skulks in the dark. I saw Jake's body among the dead, so I suppose there will be no more trouble."

The sheriff looked at Charles thoughtfully. "Why not?" he asked.

"Well, Jake was the instigator. I mean, he stirred up the farmers and ranchers and led the whole thing."

"He led them, shore," said the sheriff, "but I ain't so shore that he was the one who stirred 'em up. No I reckon someone did that from the background; someone started a whisperin' campaign. Jake was a hot-head; a whisper to him was as good as a shout. He liked trouble, and he didn't like Raiker. He might have done the open organizin'—but Jake had no brains, and this was a well-planned attack. I guess he got his instructions from someone else—someone with more brains than himself—someone who hated Raiker and saw a chance when that brawl happened the other night—someone who might have been present at the brawl, but who had already been workin' in the shadows."

Charles looked at him. "Who do you suspect?" he asked.

The sheriff's eyes slowly went round the hall, and stopped on the figure of Caroline, working over a wounded man some distance away. They stayed there, and Charles followed the look.

"I ain't sayin'—yet!" said the sheriff.

Charles was shocked. "Oh, no!" he said. "She couldn't—it isn't her nature. Besides, she couldn't have fired those shots!"

"No," said Parsons, without expression.

"I know you have far more experience in these matters than I have, Sheriff," said the doctor. "You are an old hand at the game, but I will stake my life—in any case, she was in the surgery when you were shot, and when the next shot was fired at me, she was attending to you."

"That's so," said the sheriff. "But I never said anythin' about who fired the shots. In fact, I ain't named anyone, and I won't until I'm shore. Sometimes people makes plans—and they gets out of hand—or goes wrong. I might be one o' those persons."

"What are you going to do about the Vigilantes?" asked Charles.

"Thar ain't much I can do," said the sheriff. "I've got the name of every last one of 'em, because I had someone workin' for me amongst 'em. I mighta missed a coupla names, but I don't think so."

"Was Sam Hamilton one of those names?" Charles asked.

The sheriff looked mildly surprised. "Hamilton?" he said. "No. Why should he be? He was a Raiker

man. I expected him to be one of the defenders of the *Oriental.*"

"He wasn't," said Charles. "He was out in the open. He told me he drank a quart of forty-rod and slept through everything—in a barn in the corrals."

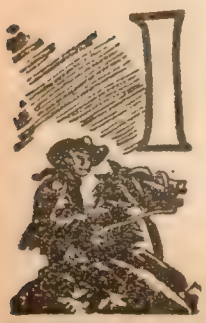
"That so?" said the sheriff. "Mebbe he did—mebbe he did. Wal, I think I'll do nothin' about the Vigies. Several lost their lives and others got badly hurt. I think they realise now they was led up the wrong trail."

"But you'll keep the cavalry here for a few days until things cool down?"

"I don't think so. They can go home today. You see, the battle was over afore they arrived. I been talkin' to some o' the Vigilantes. It seems they had already decided to give up when the sojers arrived. The majority o 'em had made that decision, although some of the young hot-heads wanted to keep goin'. But they was out-voted. You finished that battle, Doc, when you told 'em that Raiker proposed buildin' a hospital, and that he was doin' other good turns, like givin' money to Bobbie Stace. They realised that Raiker was worth havin' in the town. That's what stopped the fightin', and they was glad when the cavalry arrived and stopped further argyment. They just hit it out for home. They'll be good now, and the cavalry ain't needed."

Charles nodded, and was then called away to attend to a badly wounded man who was in delirium, and had shifted his bandages.

9



IT WAS late afternoon before Charles and Caroline could slacken up.

They were resting on one of the back seats of the hall when Rosie entered the Opera House, followed by a waiter with a tray of drinks.

"I've brought you some refreshment," she said. "The next thing, we will be sending to the next town for a doctor and nurse to come over here to attend to our doctor and nurse. You had no sleep last night; how about taking a nap now?"

"We can't," said Charles. "At least, I can't."

Rosie stood in the aisle and looked at Caroline. "And what about nursie?" she said.

"I'll manage, thank you," said Caroline, with dignity.

Rosie grinned. "All right," she said. "Don't blame me if you two keel over. I don't suppose there will be another show of Wolffe's Wild West Troupe in Toos'n, so I might as well get my gear from my dressing room and pack it. You know, Charles, you missed your gun practice this morning—and last night you had a wonderful opportunity to try yourself out."

Charles smiled. "I doubt if I will ever draw a gun with the idea of killing anyone."

"I hope you never have to," said Rosie. "Well, I guess I had better spread a little sunshine among the sick."

She wandered off, and was soon chatting with the less seriously injured, much to their pleasure.

Caroline watched her. Charles glanced at his nurse, expecting to see hate blazing from her eyes, but those eyes held a puzzled expression.

"What's puzzling you?" he asked.

She started, and glanced at him. "Who said I was puzzled?" she said.

"I did. What puzzles you about Rosie?"

"She is not exactly what I expected her to be. You see, I had formed a mental picture of her ways—and it does not fit in with what I have seen when I came in contact with her. I mean, to me she is show folk. I have never had much to do with show folk, and I had my own opinion of them. Yet, she seems just like an ordinary girl—well, almost."

Charles laughed, and looked up as

someone came through the door. It was Will Fitch. He saw them, and came to them.

"Howdy, Doc," he said. "Howdy, Carrie. Thar musta bin some fun in town last night."

"Weren't you in town?" asked Charles.

"Nope. I was at home. Town didn't seem a safe place to be. Now I'm sorry I didn't come in."

"They buried eleven men up on the hill this morning," said Caroline. "If you had come in, you might have been one of them."

"Mebbe," said Will. "I woulda bin with the farmers and ranchers, o' course. But it was no quarrel of mine, and I ain't no hot-head. Who was killed?"

Caroline told him the names.

"Excuse me," said Charles, rose, and left them to it.

He went to the sheriff's side. The sheriff had been asleep, but he was awake at the moment.

"Sheriff," said Charles. "I'd like to ask you a question."

"Shoot," said the sheriff. "Mebbe I'll answer it."

"Was Will Fitch one of the eighty-eight names you know?"

The sheriff shook his head. "No. Will was not one of 'em, and so far as I know, he was not in town last night. O' course, he coulda been—thar musta bin names I didn't know, and mebbe I had names that were not really here. I can round the farms and ranches—everyone would say that everyone else was at home; mothers would protect sons, and ranchers would protect their men. Why, what's on your mind?"

"I was just wondering," said Charles. "He said he wasn't in town—and I was just checking up."

"He's sorta engaged to young Carrie, ain't he?" said the sheriff.

"Something of the sort," said Charles dryly, and moved on to the next mattress.

The wise, old eyes of the sheriff watched him for a moment, and then swung away to where Caroline was giving Will a description of the battle. The sheriff's eyes were very thoughtful.

JUST AFTER sundown, Rosie arrived with trays of food. Neither the doctor nor the nurse had left the Opera House for more than a few minutes all day. This time Rosie found them in an argument.

"The waitress brings your supper," said Rosie.

'We won't need two meals," said Charles. "I am just sending Caroline back to the Mansion House. She can have her meal there and then go to bed."

"I'm not tired," said Caroline, although every muscle ached and there were lines of weariness around her eyes.

"All right," said Charles," "we'll say you are not tired. Then look at it this way. One of us will have to be here all night. We both cannot keep awake much longer, so you can go home and sleep from now till midnight. I will wake you up then, and you can take over until dawn, when I will come back. That's common sense, isn't it?"

"No," said Caroline. "You need sleep more than I do. You go home and sleep until midnight, and then I will sleep."

Charles took a deep breath. "Go home and get some sleep. I want you on duty from midnight to dawn."

Caroline hesitated for another second. "Very well," she said, and went out the door.

Rosie had been watching them with amusement. "Lovers quarrel, eh?" she said.

"Nonsense!" snapped Charles.

"Maybe," said Rosie. "Well, it is a pity to waste her supper, which I ordered with my own ruby lips, so I will eat it myself. If you have no objection, Charles?"

"Not at all," said Charles.

He dropped on a seat and leaned back with closed eyes. He sat like that for a moment while Rosie laid the things out on a table, then he

opened his eyes, shook his head, and prepared for another few hours.

"Tired?" asked Rosie.

"Not a bit."

"There is no need to lie to me. You won't keep me out of bed; I like my sleep, and I'm no nurse. You must be tired."

"Yes, I'm tired," he said, "but I can keep going for many hours yet. Wait until I wash my hands and throw some cold water over my face."

Raiker strolled in later. Charles had asked him to stay away before, because most of the wounded men had been his enemies the previous night, and Charles was afraid of the effect on them of seeing Raiker still hale and hearty. But since Charles had talked to the sheriff that morning, he had been round among the wounded farmers and cattle-hands, gently learning their frames of mind toward Raiker. They seemed to have had a change of front. So Charles let Raiker wander among the wounded.

"Howdy, Raiker," said one man. "You shore are too late in buildin' that hospital; you shoulda built it last week, and we coulda give it a housewarmin'."

Raiker smiled. "Wal," he said, "when I got it built, we can have another little battle, eh?"

"Shore!" said the man. "And you can be the first patient."

The words were spoken jocularly, and the patients laughed.

Rosie and Charles were standing near the door.

"Everything is sweetness and light," said Rosie in a whisper.

"Not everything," said Charles softly. "Somewhere a brain is planning something else—a murderous brain which has failed often, and will try not to fail next time."

"You mean the mysterious drygulcher?"

Charles nodded.

After Raiker had been amongst the men, he drifted around till eleven o'clock, doing an odd job here and there, and the tasks for the wounded men that they did not care to ask Rosie to do. At eleven o'clock he took Rosie home to the Mansion House, and then he went back to the *Oriental.*

At midnight Charles looked at his watch, with eyes clouded with weariness. He was unsteady on his feet. He had meant to allow Caroline to sleep right through until the morning, but now he saw that he could not keep on. It would not be fair to the wounded men if one of them reached a crisis, for Charles doubted his ability to cope with a tricky situation.

He went out of the Opera House and stood in the cool night air for a moment, letting it play on his fevered brow. The town was quiet. Most of the townsfolk had been awake overlate the night before, and all had gone early to bed this night. About the only lights in town were those blazing from the *Oriental Saloon,* and the dimmer lights of the Mansion House.

Charles set off down the boardwalk, staggering a little with weariness.

THE MOON was not so bright tonight, and it had sunk a little in the west. The barns and corrals were on that side, however, and they did not throw many long shadows, so the road was fairly clear. Charles could see a figure walking slowly ahead of him; a figure which moved as unsteadily as himself. He kept his eyes on it, because it was the only thing to look at, and he was trying to make out if it was someone he knew.

The figure drew level with the Mansion House.

The night air was split by the roar of a sixgun, and the figure half-lifted its arms and then fell forward into the dust.

The drygulcher had struck again!

Charles had not seen the flash of the gun, but he was not interested in that for the moment. Someone had been shot, and his almost instinctive job was to rush to their assistance. He threw off his weariness like a cloak and started to run. He did not stop to

think that the drygulcher might be lining his sights on him—a frail chance, even so, as the drygulcher found it safer to fire one shot before vanishing into the night.

Charles could see the dark shadow on the dust of the road ahead of him. A light was burning on the porch of the Mansion House, but its beams did not penetrate the dark for very far.

Charles reached the prostrate man, and turned him over.

It was Sam Hamilton. Charles put his arm on the man's heart and encountered a thick gush of blood—a gush it was hardly worthwhile to dam, as it was plain it came from a vital spot in the region of the heart.

"That you, Doc?" said Sam suddenly. "He got me—that coyote got me. I thought he might—one o' these days. Wal, I ain't dead yet—and I can talk—and I will."

"You know who it was?" asked Charles.

"'Course I know—and Raiker knows, too—I told him, though mebbe he didn't believe an old drunk like me." Sam coughed and spat out some blood. "Listen, Doc—and listen hard. I ain't got much time to talk..."

Charles listened, and everything became clear before Sam suddenly relaxed in his arms, and went into his last and heaviest slumber. He had not talked for more than a minute, and when the doctor, laid him down in the dust and stood up with grim purposefulness, Caroline came flying out of the Mansion House in her wrap.

"Charles—Charles!" she cried. "I heard a shot! Are you—"

"I'm all right!" said Charles, in a deadly voice. "The drygulcher struck again—and killed Sam Hamilton."

"Then it couldn't have been Sam Hamilton."

"No, but I know who it was," said Charles, in the same grim tone, "and I'm going to get him—for good!"

"Charles!" cried Caroline, but Charles took no notice. He had set off up the road, walking steadily, remorselessly. He was no longer the healer; at the moment he was a killer.

For a moment Caroline wrung her hands in anguish. Then she turned and fled inside, up the stairs and along to the end room. She battered frantically on the panels.

"Who's there?" asked Rosie, after a moment.

"It's me—Carrie! Open up—quick—quick!"

The mere fact of the caller being Caroline was enough to bring Rosie into wide wakefulness. She slipped out of bed and opened the door.

Caroline came in with a rush of words "Charles has found out who the drygulcher is—he has gone to fight it out with him—he's tired—he is no gunslick. You are the only one who can stop him—you can kill the drygulcher before he kills Charles. Oh, please, please! If you save Charles' life you can have him—I'll go away—leave town—anything—but save his life—please save him."

Rosie kept calm. She started to dress hurriedly. "Get your clothes on," she said. "We can't go around town in our nightgowns. I'll save him if I can—but I'll save him for you, kid. You love him more than I do. I never loved a man so much that I'd give him to my rival—even to save his life. Get into your clothes. And hurry."

CHARLES had walked up the street, and now he came to the swinging doors of the *Oriental Saloon*. He pushed them open with his foot and stepped inside, his right hand hanging ready, his mind set on one act, and one

act only. Just inside the door he almost ran into Raiker.

"Why," said Raiker, "I thought you—" Then he saw Charles' face, the stare in his weary eyes, and he stopped suddenly. "You—you know?"

Charles nodded, his eyes sweeping the room. "The drygulcher got Sam Hamilton," he said steadily. "Sam told me everything before he died. You knew?"

"I wasn't shore," said Raiker, "but I am now. He just came in. Leave this to me, Doc. You ain't no gun-slick, and you're wore out. Leave it to me."

He turned and started across the long dance floor. There were few patrons in the place, because the events of the night before had sent them to bed early. A few stood against the bar at the other end of the room, and among them was Will Fitch. He was leaning with his back to the bar, his arms folded.

He watched the two men walking quickly toward him, and his eyes narrowed.

Raiker and Charles came on, Charles trying to get before Raiker, but the saloon-keeper held his forward position by adroit movements. Neither man had drawn a gun, though each wore one in plain view.

They came to within five paces of Fitch, then Will's arms suddenly unfolded, and a gun was in his right hand. There was the stark terror of the cornered rat in his eyes. He did not bring the gun into line with his eyes, but blazed away.

Raiker spun round and lurched against Charles. He had drawn too late. Fitch had not had to draw; he had been prepared for trouble. Charles grabbed at Raiker with his left hand, while his right shot for his gun in the best traditions taught him by Rosie. His gun came up to his eye and roared its message at the same moment that two other guns spoke in different quarters of the room.

Fitch had had time to fire only one shot before three slugs thudded into his body—one from the doctor and one each from gunmen of Raiker's who had gone into instant action. Will's body crumbled into the sawdust, his head on the brass rail, his staring eyes glaring at the tawdry decorations on the ceiling.

Charles holstered his gun and bent over Raiker as he lay him down.

"Only a clip," said Raiker. "I should have been ready for that trick when I saw his folded arms. But he was yella—he fired wild. I guess he's clipped a bitta bone outta my shoulder."

"I'll soon see," said Charles, and went to work.

"You get him, Doc?" asked Raiker.

"I got him—I don't know where but I aimed for his heart. Your boys shot him, too."

"He was a fool to come in here, though I suppose he thought it was cunnin', and we are the only place open. He knoo I knoo, too, but he was brazenin' it out. Wal, you got him, Doc, just as you seem to get everythin' in this town—even Rosie."

"I don't want Rosie, and never did," said Charles.

The doors flew open, and Rosie and Caroline came rushing in. Rosie had a naked gun in her hand. Two of Raiker's gun-slicks were leaning over Will Fitch's body.

For a moment the girls paused; then came on. Rosie dropped on her knee beside Raiker. "Oh, John—John," she said. "What have they done to you?"

Raiker smiled at her. "I just got a clip," he said.

"But it wasn't you—I know it wasn't you!" said Rosie.

"No," said Charles, "it wasn't Raiker. It was Will Fitch. His body is up there."

"Will Fitch!" exclaimed Caroline, who had been getting her breath.

"Will Fitch was the drygulcher," said Charles. "Help me get Raiker on to a bed and I'll tell you about it."

"Is he hurt bad, Doc?" said Rosie. "I wouldn't want him to be hurt bad."

"Why?" asked Charles.

"Because I like the coyote!" said Rosie.

"Wal, that ain't so bad," said Raiker, as men lifted him.

"I'll make it better," said Rosie. "I guess I love the dumb skunk, and I'll marry him if he'll have me."

"That's worth a slug in the shoulder any day," said Raiker with a grin. "Doc you been jilted!"

THEY CARRIED Raiker to his bedroom and laid him on the bed while the doctor dressed the wound. Caroline standing by and helping where she could. While Charles worked he told them about Will Fitch.

"Will was the quiet, planning sort," said the doctor. "He was also a coward, and he knew it. His personality craved self-praise, so he fell back on his plans. But the main reason for all the trouble was his love of Caroline. It was the obsession of his life. Caroline's father evidently felt the same about him as Caroline did, and he showed that while he lived, Fitch would never marry his daughter."

"Those were his words," said Caroline.

"Dangerous words," said Charles. "They gave Will an idea. So one night he rode into town, hid in the corrals opposite the Mansion House, and shot Dr. Guthrie down. Then he went back through the yards, got his horse, and rode home. He thought he had got away with that very nicely, not knowing that Sam Hamilton, sleeping off one of his daily jags, was in an open barn just behind him. Will used the darkness of the barn as his cover, and the shot was so close it woke Sam, who was not as drunk as usual. Of course, Sam could no more see Will than Will could see him, but Sam got up from his straw bed and followed Will a little way, seeing him plain enough in the moonlight to identify him. The next day Hamilton went to his friend—his only friend—John Raiker, and told him what he had seen, connecting it with the finding of Dr. Guthrie's body."

"I gave him a hearing," said Raiker. "But I could not take too much stock of what he said. I wouldn't hang any man on the evidence of a guy like Sam Hamilton. I told him to keep his discovery to himself. The reason I told him that was I thought he might get talking, and his words get carried back to Will Fitch. If Fitch happened to be the guilty one, then Sam might find himself dry-gulched one night."

"He took your advice—almost," went on Charles. "Sam got very drunk one night, and when he was very drunk he was bad-tempered. He ran against Will, and he told Will he was a dry-gulching skunk—and he also told Will that he had seen him shoot Dr. Guthrie. Sam added that he had told Raiker the whole story. Will now saw that his guilty secret was not a bit safe. Two persons knew it. So one night he lay in wait for Raiker outside the Mansion House—but he missed!"

"Thanks to you," said Raiker.

"But he fired at you," said Rosie. "You didn't know he killed Dr. Guthrie."

"No. He wanted to kill me for the same reason he killed Guthrie—because I stood between him and his ambition to marry Caroline. He was jealous—he thought Caroline might fall in love with me—"

'She had," said Rosie with a chuckle.

"She and another," added Caroline.

"So he tried to kill me. He missed again. His enemies were increased, so he really did some thinking, and he developed a plan which might wipe them all out in one go. He got the idea from the fight in the Opera House. The next day he went to Jake and did some whispering; for days he whispered round the district, riding far and wide, but never pushing himself too much into the open. He left all the main talking and leadership to Jake—and Jake loved it. Will's plan was this. He would get the Vigilantes to attack Raiker, and he would make sure by

whispers that Raiker—and also Hamilton, who was a Raiker man—would be lynched. If, during the battle men fell then I—as the doctor—might come forward to pick up the wounded, so Will placed himself in ambush to wait for that moment. This night was to be a grand clean-up of his enemies. The sheriff almost spoilt his plans, so, to start trouble, he shot the sheriff. He was changing his position when I ran up the road, but he got his chance later when I was bringing in a man. Once more he missed. The Vigilantes then made it so hot for him, searching all along the corrals, that he made himself scarce and went home. He could wait another day.

"Today he comes back into town, and tonight he gets Sam. One enemy was done. He leaves the corrals, crosses the road in the dark, and comes into the *Oriental*—the only place in town still open. And, going on what I had heard from Sam, and not doubting it like Raiker, I came on here. So Will died, with two of his enemies still alive—and with his ambition unsatisified."

Rosie looked at Caroline. "It was a laudable ambition," she said. "Carrie is all a man could wish. She even loved a man so much that—but let that pass. Thank goodness I saw the light in time. I could never be a doctor's wife; I never could leave the bright lights. No, I am more suited to be a saloon-keeper's wife—and I'll make John here one of the greatest and best loved citizens this town has ever known—you see if I don't. Good lord, he has gone to sleep."

Charles had dropped on to a chair and gone to sleep while she talked. Rosie shook him.

"Hi, Charles," she said, "wake up and we'll find you a bed. We're to be married tomorrow."

Charles opened his sleepy eyes. "We're not," he said. "We never were. I'm going to marry Caroline."

"That's what I meant, you fool," said Rosie. "It will be a double wedding."

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Demeree objected to the rabbit-faced juryman. "He's a moron," the defense lawyer said to Judge Steele.

"Our ancestors, your honor, were not good spellers. They frequently misspelled names in their indictments, so judges hit onto this rule of idem sonans. Under this rule, it is not required that the defendant's name be correctly spelled in the indictment if, when pronounced, it sounds like his true name." Well, figured Judge Steele, this covered the fact that everyone seemed to have a slightly different version of Cephas Waggin's name. But he hadn't counted on the foreman of the jury bringing in a verdict that no one could understand!

IDEM SONANS

Judge Steele Story by Lon Williams

JUDGE WARDLOW STEELE entered Flat Creek's jammed courtroom in a surly, fighting mood. In his opinion, this clumsy attempt by Flat Creek citizens to substitute legal justice for vigilante methods was anything but progress. That mistake was bad enough. When they selected an ignoramus gold-digger like him for their judge, they'd scraped bottom. But a judge he was, by thunder, and so long as he remained one life for murdering varmints wasn't going to be easy.

He sat down heavily and gave his sandy head a jerk. "Sheriff, call court."

Sheriff Jerd Buckalew, tall, raw-

boned and poker-faced, rose and pounded an inverted barrel with his forty-five. "Court's now in session. If anybody don't believe it, let him go home while he can."

Heavily armed deputies here and there hitched up their gunbelts and nodded subconsciously. Well-posted Vigies stood rock still but cast grim, watchful eyes toward potential disturbers.

Judge Steele tugged at his straw-colored mustache, gave his head another jerk. "Skiffy, call fust case."

Clerk James Skiffington, long, thin and gloomy, scarecrowed up. His voice was harsh and forced with pent-up doom. "People *versus* Cephas Waggin, alias Wig Waggin. Charge, first degree murder."

Steele looked down at a puncheon bench reserved for varmints in their twilight hours. There sat as mean looking canine as he'd observed in years, lithe, shifty, snarling, and undoubtedly as creepy as a feline. "Murder, eh? Well, you come to a bad place to commit murder when you hit Flat Creek; you got a lawyer?"

A beanpole in black suit, white vest and black four-in-hand necktie got up. He had a sharp face, dark hair, abbreviated burnsides and a self-confident demeanor. "I am his lawyer, your honor. French Demeree."

In this clever practitioner Steele saw personification of all his judicial difficulties. His face writhed with distaste. "Yeah, Demeree from Tennessee. Like a bad penny, you always turn up whar you ain't wanted. Don't you know that murderers ought to be hung? Be-consarned if I can see why thar's got to be such a fight over 'em." He swung left. "Whar's our man?"

A stocky redhead with noble brow and benign countenance got up. "Wade Claybrook, your honor. Prosecuting attorney."

Steele surveyed his man Claybrook with mixed feelings. Claybrook looked pugnacious enough, but his nobility had ways of adulterating his good sense, especially when good sense and hard, cold justice were needed most. Steele gave his mustache a couple of vicious jerks and looked down at defendant Waggin.

"All right, you weasel, what's your plea?"

Demeree arose. "If your honor please, defendant moves that this indictment be quashed and that he be discharged."

Here was trouble, as Steele had expected. "Consarn you, Demeree," he demanded vehemently, "what in tarnation do you mean?"

Demeree's poise continued unshaken. "May it please this honorable court, in plain language defendant moves that this indictment be thrown out and that he be set free."

Steele's urge to sarcasm was irresistible. "Now ain't that a purty howdy-do! That's what I'd call gittin' off easy."

To Demeree it was no occasion for levity. He elevated his sharp chin. "Defendant is not being facetious, your honor. There is a well-settled rule of criminal law that a man may not be brought to trial for murder, unless and until he has been indicted. This indictment charges one Cephas Waggin, alias Wig Waggin, with having committed murder. My client here is not Cephas Waggin. Nor yet is he Wig Waggin."

"Who in thunder is he then?" Steele growled impatiently.

Demeree announced quietly, "He is Cephalus Wiggin, your honor."

"Humph! Ain't he got no alias?"

Demeree nodded complacently, "Yes, your honor. He is sometimes called Wag Wiggin, but not Wig Waggin."

Steele's wrath burned slowly. "Demeree, do you mean to stand thar and say that two-legged polecat has got to be turned loose because his name ain't spelled right?"

Demeree remained cool. "I certainly do, your honor. It is not permissible to indict one man and try another;

nor is it permissible to indict a man by one name and try him by another name. Nothing is better settled in our law than that such variance is fatal to an indictment."

CLAYBROOK got up with an air of patient and conciliatory understanding. "Now, if your honor please, I am quite aware of what Mr. Demeree is driving at. He alludes to a principle that certainly has centuries of precedent and tradition behind it. But there is no merit to his contention in this instance. Mr. Demeree knows, as well as I know, that under our common law rule of *idem sonans*—"

"Idem what?" demanded Steele angrily.

Claybrook exercised marked self-control. "*Idem sonans*, if your honor please. It means *sounding same*, or *same sounding*. Mr. Demeree is right—"

Steele pounded with his fist. "See hyar, Claybrook. Don't ever admit that Demeree is right; you can stomp him if you want to, but don't defend him."

Claybrook arched his eyebrows. "Let me put it this way then, if I may. Our ancestors were not good spellers, if your honor please."

"Are they good spellers now, Claybrook?"

Claybrook peered through his eyebrows. "If I may continue, sir, our ancestors were not good spellers. They frequently misspelled names in their indictments, so, judges hit onto this rule of *idem sonans*. Under this rule, it is not required that defendant's name be correctly spelled in his indictment if, when pronounced, it sounds like his true name. For example, *n-i-t* and *k-n-i-t* are *idem sonans*, though spelled differently. So, if defendant's name had been Nit, but spelled Knit in his indictment, that variance would have been cured by our rule of *idem sonans*."

"That is a good example," Demeree said quickly. "It shows perfectly that Cephas Waggin and Celphalus Wiggin are not *idem sonans*. That is true, also, of Wig and Wag. Wig Waggin does not, by any imaginative acrobatics, sound like Wag Wiggin."

"Now, your honor," Claybrook said with mild insistence, "it is not required that they sound *exactly* alike; it is sufficient in law if they sound *substantially* alike, so long as nobody, especially defendant, is misled or deceived."

Demeree's manner grew belligerent. "If your honor please, defendant disagrees. Words must sound alike, otherwise *idem sonans* will not cure this critical variance. There is *some* similarity between Wig and Wag. There is also *some* similarity between Leviticus and Ecclesiastes, but as for *sounding same* they are no more alike than *mule* and *mudcake*."

"Enough is enough, by thunder. Consarn you lawyers, I wonder how long you'd keep this up if nobody called a halt. Trouble is, you've got more larnin' than you've got sense. What we're interested in hyar is whether we've got our hooks in a man charged with murder. Call him Wig Waggin or Wag Wiggin, accordin' to your taste, but we'll hang him if he's guilty, no matter if he's Christopher Columbus."

Before Steele could say more, Demeree tried again. "Your honor, defendant moves to quash this indictment on still another ground."

Steele tensed. "Now see hyar, Demeree, one ground is enough. That hyena is charged with murder; what's your plea?"

Demeree also tensed, but a lawyer was disadvantaged in controversy with a judge. He yielded to necessity. "Defendant pleads not guilty, your honor."

"It's about time. Bucky, panel a jury."

Buckalew nodded toward Skiffington. "Call names, Skiffy."

DEMEREE found numerous objections to prospective jurors who scrouged forward, exhausted his

peremptory challenges, relied once more on challenge for cause. "Defendant objects to Mr. Funny Face, your honor." He indicated, "That one called Rabbit Hembrie."

A tall, rabbit-faced juror arose. His nose and mouth twitched. "He jeckie to me?"

Steele snapped sharply, "You set down thar. Whether he's objecting to you or not is no consarn of yours. Demeree, what's your objection?"

"He's a moron, your honor."

Hembrie half-rose. "Wetty 'e say?"

Steele glared at Hembrie. "He said you was a moron. Set down and shut up before you prove his point; Demeree, you're overruled." Steele gave his audience a sweeping glance. "Witnesses come and be sworn."

Several came forward, held up their right hands before Clerk Skiffington, were then herded to a back room.

Steele glared at Claybrook. "Call fust witness, and git this trial started. We ought to been through it already."

Claybrook nodded toward a deputy sheriff. "Call Lew Deckard."

A lean gold-digger with a squinted eye was brought in and seated as a witness. He looked round with deadpan expression until Claybrook got up.

"Your name?" Claybrook asked.

"Lew Deckard."

"Where do you live?"

Demeree got up. "Now, your honor, defendant will stipulate that Lew Deckard, otherwise known as Stacked Deck, Squint-eye Deckard and Lulu, is a Flat Creek gold-digger, has a shack in Sarlay Gulch, knows defendant, and has one good eye."

"If your honor please," said Claybrook indignantly, "I object to being interrupted by Mr. Demeree. His offer to stipulate is uncalled for and unwanted. If he wishes to plead his client guilty, he may do so; otherwise, *I* shall prove him guilty."

Steele filled with pride. "Claybrook, that's getting him told; you go right ahead in your own way."

Claybrook lowered his face and glared through his eyebrows at Witness Deckard. "Were you acquainted with William Brumley, owner of a store on Sarlay Street?"

"You mean him that was killed by Wag Wiggin?"

"I do."

"I knowed him, but his name was not William Brumley. It was Gill Burnley."

Demeree was up instantly. "Now, your honor, defendant has a right here that calls for assertion."

Steele leaned forward. "Demeree, you're taking up a heap of time."

Demeree tightened with determination. "Your honor, this indictment charges one Cephas Waggin, alias Wig Waggin, with having murdered one William Brumley. This witness has just testified that one Wig Waggin, or Wag Wiggin, killed not one William Brumley, but one Gill Burnley. Your honor has just overruled defendant's motion based upon misnomer, to which ruling defendant would except were it not but an idle gesture in this court to except to anything. Here, now, is a much clearer case for defendant's motion to quash and discharge. This indictment, prepared by Mr. Claybrook or by his grand jury, charges that one Wig Waggin murdered one William Brumley. This defendant did not kill William Brumley. If he killed anybody, which he denies, deceased was Gill Burnley. It is not permissible to charge a defendant with murder of one person, then try him for allegedly having killed another person. Defendant should be discharged, your honor, and for nothing held."

Claybrook was waiting confidently. "Now, your honor, there's no point to going through all that again. It is another instance of *idem sonans*."

"Why, of course," snapped Steele. "Demeree, you're overruled; proceed, Mr. Claybrook."

Demeree sat down, frustrated and vexed.

CLAYBROOK eyed his witness. "Mr. Deckard, where were you

last Saturday night between eleven and twelve o'clock?"

"I was in Gill Burnley's store."

"What were you doing there?"

"I was helping Gill and Enos Hunter watch for a thief."

"Relate what happened."

Deckard reflected a moment; a furrow intruded upon his dead-pan expression. "Well, before I could do that, I'd ought to explain Gill's layout, and where each of us was hidin'."

Demeree rose quickly. "If your honor please, this witness was asked to relate what happened, not to draw word pictures of what something looked like."

Steele tugged slowly at his mustache, but savagery had begun to stir in him. "Demeree, set down."

Claybrook's nobility was touched. "Mr. Demeree has in mind an important rule of evidence, your honor; I, therefore, withdraw that question."

"No, by thunder, you don't," growled Steele. "Wade Claybrook, beconsarned if you ain't about as disappointin' as a man could git. One minute we'd think you was goin' to show real fight, then by next minute you've become a mouse. Squint-eye, you go on and tell what happened, layout and all."

Claybrook sat down and stuck out his lower lip.

"I was going to say, Judge," said Deckard, "that there was three of us. Gill's store has a front door, a back door, and a side window. I was hiding up front, Gill at back, and Enos Hunter behind a counter opposite that one window. Somebody had been breaking into stores lately, and Gill figured it was about time for somebody to burglar him; so he hired me and Enos to help watch. But there was one thing he hadn't figured on—that was his cellar. Well, sir, along about midnight we hear a noise. But it don't come from no quarter we're watchin'; it comes from that cellar. First, a squeak. Then noises like somebody creepin' up steps. Then a floor-door is pushed up slow and careful. Up comes a small lantern and an arm. Then up comes a man's head. That's followed by a long, crawlin' body that'd remind you of a snake, if ever you saw it crawlin'. I'm so scared I can't move, but Gill Burnley yells out, 'Grab him, boys; there's our sneakin' burglar.' "

Demeree eased up cautiously. "Defendant objects to his telling what somebody said."

Claybrook got up hurriedly. "That's right, your honor. He wasn't asked to tell what somebody said; he was asked to tell what happened."

"You lawyers set down," demanded Steele. "If we didn't have to be bothered with lawyers, I reckon a court of law could get along with some measure of respectability. This witness was asked to tell what happened. Well, by thunder, what somebody said in a pinch like that is part of what happened. Now see hyar, Squint-eye, you go on and tell what happened, and if somebody got excited and said something, you tell that too."

Squint-eye's dead-pan expression continued unperturbed. "Well, as I was going to say, Judge, this crawlin' snake didn't wait to be grabbed. He h'isted a sixshooter and blazed away. Never heard so much shootin' all at once in my life. Gill screamed, 'I'm shot, boys; I'm shot.' Enos Hunter had been booming away with his sixgun, but he must've been most as scared as I was, because all he hit was dishes in a shelf and a few pots and pans. When Hunter's gun was empty, this crawlin' snake went after him with a knife. I heard a thud, like a knife plunged into something. Hunter screamed, 'I'm stobbed; I'm stobbed.' Then there was groans and gurgles, and then that snake crawled out where I could see him again. By then I'd sort of got hold of myself. When he started to stand up I cut drive with my shotgun, figuring I'd cut him in two, but he was getting on his feet pretty fast and I missed him clean.

Still, there's something about a shotgun, Judge, that puts fear into bad hearts where a sixgun wouldn't faze 'em. Well, when that shotgun boomed out, he dived for that cellar hole. Didn't even bother to pick up his lantern. That's about it, Judge."

Claybrook eased up. "Your honor." he said importantly, "that lacks a great deal of being 'about it'."

In spite of Claybrook's gloating spirit, Steele admired his persistence. "All right, Claybrook, squeeze it out of him."

CLAYBROOK lowered his head and glared up at Deckard. "So you saw a man's head come up through a cellar hole, did you?"

"I did," replied Deckard. "When that trapdoor was pushed up and back, a lantern came up followed by a man's head.

"And did you recognize this creeping, crawling creature that came up out of that cellar?"

"I did, sir."

"Who was it?"

"It was that town sneak and loafer called Wag Wiggin."

"Do you see Wag Wiggin in this courtroom?"

"Certainly. That's him over there by Mr. Demeree."

"And is he that creeping, crawling creature you saw come up out of Gill Burnley's cellar hole?"

"He is."

"That's all," said Claybrook. He sat down.

Once more Steele was proud of his man Claybrook. But he turned a sour face toward French Demeree. "Want to cross-examine?"

Demeree rose, said, "No, your honor," and sat down.

"Next witness, Claybrook."

Claybrook nodded at a deputy. "Lum Trotter."

Trotter was brought in and seated. He was a good looking middle-aged man in jeans, boots and checkered shirt.

"Your name is Lum Trotter?" said Claybrook.

"It is."

"Sometimes called Horse Trotter?"

"Sometimes."

"Last Saturday night, between eleven o'clock and midnight, did you hear a commotion at Gill Burnley's store?"

"Object," said Demeree, rising cautiously. "That is a leading question; Mr. Claybrook should know he can't ask leading questions."

"I withdraw it," said Claybrook quickly.

Steele scowled. "You don't have to take that off of him, Claybrook. Why don't you stand your ground?"

Claybrook stared up at his witness. "Where were you last Saturday night between eleven and twelve o'clock?"

Witness Trotter twisted slightly, glanced at Demeree, then at Claybrook. "I reckon you want to know if I was at Gill Burnley's store. Well, I was. I was there along of several other men, and we went there because we heard a commotion, like guns bangin' and men screaming. When we busted in—"

"Just answer my questions, please," said Claybrook curtly.

"All right, sir," said Trotter. "Just tell me what you want to know."

"I merely want you to answer my questions." Claybrook frowned. "What did you see when you entered Burnley's store?"

"I saw a lantern beside an open trapdoor; that store sure smelled like burnt gunpowder, too."

"I didn't ask you what you smelled. Just relate what you saw."

"Somebody picked up that lantern, and we looked around. Heard groans, and back of a barrel we found Gill Burnley, on his back and all bloody and dying. I bent over him, got hold of his hand and said—"

"Now, your honor," objected Demeree, "he can't tell what somebody said. Defendant objects."

Claybrook fired back, "He can tell what *he himself* said, though he can't

tell what somebody else said."

"That's correct," agreed Demeree.

"Proceed," said Claybrook.

Witness Trotter eyed Claybrook with a touch of scorn. "Proceed where?"

Claybrook snapped back, "Tell what you said to Gill Burnley."

Trotter considered a moment, eyed Claybrook sharply, but decided to speak further. "Well, as I was about to tell you, I said to Burnley, 'Who done it, Gill?' Gill stared up at me, saw by lantern light who I was, and said—"

DEMEREE arose. "Now, your honor, Mr. Claybrook has just conceded that this witness is not permitted to tell what somebody else said."

Steele's nostrils dilated wrathfully. "Demeree, you're overruled. Claybrook can concede his head off, if he's a mind to; this court ain't concedin' nothin'. Demeree, you know by now that a witness can relate dying declarations. That's an exception to your consarned hearsay evidence rule."

"But, your honor, it must first be shown to have *been* a dying declaration."

Veins swelled in Steele's forehead. "Demeree, have you been asleep? Horse Trotter has just said that Burnley was all bloody and dying."

"But that doesn't make it a dying declaration, your honor."

Claybrook intervened heroically. "Your honor, I can explain. What Mr. Demeree has in mind is this: To make a dying declaration, Burnley himself must have *known* he was dying."

"Then you find out if Burnley *knowed* he was dying, by thunder."

Claybrook faced his witness. "Mr. Trotter, did Gill Burnley know he was dying?"

Demeree was still up. "Now, your honor, that is asking for a conclusion; witnesses are not permitted to draw conclusions."

"I withdraw that question," said Claybrook magnanimously.

"No you don't," Steele growled. "Trotter, you answer that question."

Horse twisted round toward Steele. "Judge, I'll tell you what Burnley said when he looked up and recognized me."

"Tell it."

"He said to me, 'Horse,' he said, 'I'm hit for keeps. I ain't got but a minute or two. You go take care of Enos and don't waste time with me.' And I said, 'Gill,' I said, 'who shot you?' Gill sort of gurgled and choked, then he stared up at me and said, 'It was that sneakin' bum Ceph Wagner. I saw him—plain—saw him plain. He had a lantern. He—' Then he gurgled again, and right then choked up and died."

Steele swiped his mustache and glared at Claybrook. "Any more questions?"

Claybrook had sat down. He was pouting. "No questions," he muttered.

"Demeree?"

"No, but I have a motion, your honor."

Steele got up, pressed his fists down on his desk. "Demeree, you connivin' stinker, don't you start that again. Maybe *idem sonans* don't make Wagner out of Waggin, but get your mouth full of blood and try to say "Waggin'. You probably wouldn't get nothin' but red blubbers. Set down thar, Demeree." Demeree eased down. Steele, also, sat down. "Claybrook, call next witness."

Claybrook got up sulkily. "Call Tolliver Dew."

A TALL, friendly man with a big Adam's apple came in and sat down.

Claybrook gave him a mean look. "Is your name Tolliver Dew?"

Dew nodded and smiled. "Yes, sir, that's my name, though I'm mostly called Tol Dew. People are that way, you know, always lookin' for short names."

Claybrook snapped, "Never mind philosophizing; just answer my questions. Tolliver Dew, where were you

last Saturday night between eleven and twelve o'clock?"

Tol Dew smiled. "Part of that time I was in Gill Burnley's store, where there'd been some shootin'. You know, Gill Burnley was killed there that night, killed by a man named—"

"Will you just answer my questions!" stormed Claybrook. "Did you see Enos Hunter in Burnley's store?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"What was his condition when you saw him?"

Tol looked sad. "He was dying, sir."

"How do you know he was dying?"

"Because it warn't long before he was dead."

Claybrook grunted and studied a moment. "Before he died, did he say anything to indicate he knew he was dying?"

"Object," shouted Demeree. "That's not only a leading question; it also calls for a conclusion. Mr. Claybrook knows—"

"I withdraw that question," said Claybrook.

Steele leaned forward. "Tol Dew. answer that question."

Dew twisted round. "Judge, I'll tell you what Enos said and you can decide for yourself. I was kneelin' beside Enos, talking to him as best I could, trying to get him to say something. Finally he opened his eyes and stared at me. 'Is it you, Tolliver?' he says. 'It's me, Enos,' I answers. 'Glad to see you, Tolliver,' Enos says. 'I won't be seeing you anymore at our claims up in Sarlay; there's going to be a different sort of diggin's for me pretty soon.' Enos sort of smiles then and says, 'I'm hoping to hit pay dirt, Tolliver—I'm hoping.' Of course, Judge, I don't know what Enos knew, but from his talk I'd say he knowed his diggin's in Sarlay Gulch was over."

Steele felt himself torn by a strange kind of fury. "Tol, did Enos name any names?"

"Yes, sir, Judge, he did," said Dew. "When I asked him who knifed him, he said, 'It was—' Enos gasped and struggled a bit, then he tried again. 'It was that no-good Josephus Wiggam,' he said. Enos tried to explain about a lantern and somebody creeping up through a cellar hole, but he went off his mind along there and in a few seconds was dead."

Steele scowled at Claybrook. "Any more questions?"

"No, your honor."

"Demeree?"

Steele's voice was so full of menace that Demeree eased down from a half-risen position.

"No questions, your honor."

Tol Dew went out and Steele jerked his head. "You jurors go out and fetch in a verdict."

They filed out and stayed two or three minutes longer than juries usually stayed out. When they returned, they walked slowly and solemnly. Rabbit Hembrie came last. He alone remained standing.

Steele glared at Hembrie, at his fellow-jurors, then back at Hembrie. Consarn them jurors! "Well!"

Hembrie jumped, startled.

Steele snarled at him. "Don't just stand thar. What's your verdict?"

Rabbit Hembrie swallowed. His nose and mouth twitched. Finally he assumed a brave stance and said, "Gitty up fit diggity muddy."

Steele tensed and stared. "What in tarnation did you say?"

"Gitty up fit diggity muddy."

Steele relaxed. "Oh. I git it now; but that's a consarned sorry way to say anything." He swung toward Sheriff Buckalew, but his eyes met Demeree's slender, resolute erectness. "All right, Demeree, start talkin'."

DEMEREE looked at Steele with a question in his eye. "Your honor, if it were not that I might be invited to let them speak, I should say that here is a situation where facts speak for themselves. This trial has come to a pass where it can go no further. Due respect for revered traditions and precedents of our law demands that this defendant be discharged."

"Hold on thar, Demeree, you can

leave off your oratory. What's eatin' on you?"

Demeree said tightly, "Your honor, a verdict has been reached, but it must remain forever locked in each juror's bosom; they have selected as their foreman a man who cannot talk."

Steele perspired, but he tried to keep that phenomenon concealed. "Demeree, they can go out and select a new foreman."

"No, your honor," said Demeree. "Once they have arrived at a verdict, they are not permitted to withdraw and reconsider. If they did that, they might change their verdict, or one juror might change his views and cause a hung jury. As said of Median and Persian laws, a verdict once reached altereth not. In this case, it is destined to remain one of time's undiscovered secrets."

Claybrook rose manfully. "Your honor, I'm afraid Mr. Demeree is right. This verdict—"

"Claybrook, set down thar." Judge Steele half-rose; anger gleamed savagely. "Be-consarned, you'll git on Demeree's side or bust. If you ain't got nothin' to say for our side, you just shut up and don't say nothin'. Strikes me you had a good idear once. That *idem sonans* business, it was. Why in tarnation didn't you hang onto it?"

"Sir," Claybrook said angrily, defiantly, "even a legal principle as elastic as that won't stretch over a mountain."

Steele controlled his temper. According to his lights, Claybrook should have been fined for contempt of court. "Wade," Steele said calmly, "if you'd show fight like that when fight is needed, and whar it's needed, Flat Creek would be mighty proud of you. That *idem sonans* principle you've been tossing about fits this situation perfectly. Anybody ought to know that what Rabbit Hembrie said was, *Guilty of first degree murder*. Sounding same, by thunder!"

Demeree had calmed. "Your honor, without intending any disrespect for

this honorable court, I wish to commend Mr. Claybrook for his upright and gentlemanly principles. His sense of fairness tells him, as it tells your humble servant, that *Gitty up fit diggity muddy* does not even remotely sound like *Guilty of first degree murder.*"

Steele grew tight again. "Demeree, if it don't sound like *Guilty of first degree murder*, what in tarnation does it sound like?"

"Your honor," said Demeree, "I fear I'm not fast enough on my feet to give a suitable answer to that, but offhand I'd say it sounded like, *Git up horsie and don't mind a little mud.*"

CLAYBROOK had sat down. He sulked and enjoyed His Honor's misery and darkly indicated discomfiture.

But Steele was thinking; he was no ways near to giving up. Be-consarned if that murderin' polecat Wag Wiggin was going to escape on some fool technicality. Steele stared at Claybrook, then at his jurors; they were all as solemn as pallbearers. One whiskered gold-digger had one cheek stuck out, but just to show he wasn't stifling a grin with his tongue he started chewing. Maybe they regarded themselves as clever in selecting a tongue-tied rodent for a foreman, but they didn't strike him as clever.

"Claybrook!" he growled.

Claybrook paled slightly, but got up. "Yes, your honor."

"Do you know any law by which we can hang these jurors?"

Twelve men tensed and looked scared.

Claybrook shook his head. "No, your honor. I surmise that you disapprove of their having selected Rabbit Hembrie as foreman, but in contemplation of law, one juror is equally qualified with every other to be foreman. No law has been violated."

"Demeree!"

Demeree had not sat down. "Yes, your honor."

"Do you know of any law by which these jurors can be hung?"

Demeree shook his head. "If your honor please, I should say they are hopelessly hung already."

Steele swiped a hand across his mouth. In his opinion, these jurors ought to be hung, but he had no present plans for hanging them. What he mostly did in this crisis was stall for time; he needed an idea. He was stumped, but he'd be-consarned if he meant to give up.

He looked steadily at Rabbit Hembrie, who had eased down and made himself as small as possible. "Stand up thar, you nose-twitchin' rabbit. I want to ask you a question."

Rabbit got up.

Steele eyed him coldly. "How would you say *Not guilty?*"

"Nit gitty," replied Rabbit promptly.

"How would you say *Guilty?*"

"Gitty."

"And how would you say *Guilty of first degree murder?*"

"Gitty up fit diggity muddy."

"Set down!"

Rabbit sat down.

Steele gave Rabbit's fellow-jurors a look they'd remember. He turned then to Sheriff Jerd Buckalew. "All right, Bucky. Wiggin is your meat. Hang him."

★

They were safe under the bubble, but the outside world was cut off completely. But what bothered Rosie was the mystery of where Tessie had gotten a new dress, when everyone else was in rags.

Here's a sly and sardonic novelet,

ROSIE LIVED IN A BUBBLE

by Monroe Schere

Veteran science-fictionists will remember M. Schere as author of such irreverent tales as "Let Cymbals Ring" and "Anachronistic Optics". But old and new readers will welcome his return.

Watch for the August

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

COME IN, KILLER!

by Jay Tyler

Everything about the killing of this Englishman seemed to be misleading. But Asa Lyons and Jonathan Gaunt felt that there was something basically wrong — which could lead to the right answer . . .

JONATHAN GAUNT propped his elbows on the window sill of the *Jessamy Flats Gazette* office, and watched a horsefly perched on the hitching rail outside. He sucked in his cheeks, ready to let a stream of tobacco juice fly at the unoffending insect, then sighed and spat out the quid instead. "Filthy habit," he muttered. "It's time I started to mend my ways; think I'll shift to cigars."

"Emulating our President, eh?" Jim Rodgers applied a rag industriously to the plate of the foot-pedal press that ran off the town paper each week, as well as taking on job printing between issues. "Hear tell that General Grant's having a worse time with the grafters in Washington than he ever had with the rebels in the Wilderness."

Gaunt nodded as he stretched his lean frame. "The General's an honest man, but I'm afraid he's one of these folks who can't conceive—since they're upright themselves—that any man they like can possibly be crooked."

Rodgers nodded. "I smell an editorial coming on. Maybe you could give it to me to set up today, instead of waiting until deadline tomorrow, huh?"

"We'll see," said Gaunt. "Town matters take precedence. Folks are beginning to suspect that Gus Hanley's connected with the robberies that have been taking place around the saloon. I think a few words of caution about jumping to conclusions would be in order."

"Oh," said Rodgers. "My nose got mixed up; it's a conference with the sheriff I smelled coming up."

Gaunt reached for his hat. "Wrong again. I'm having an interview with that Englishman over at Hanley's. What he wants to do here could mean a very good deal for Jessamy Flats, if he does it in the right way." Without waiting for a reply the editor started out the door and across the street.

Still, he thought, he should say a few words about the national situation, as more and more citizens were openly voicing disgust with the administration. Re-electing General Grant might or might not have been wise; nonetheless, the man who had saved the Union deserved better treatment than he was getting.

The rawboned editor pushed his way through Hanley's batwing doors and blinked for a moment in the relative dimness, after the glare of the street. He waved to Hanley, behind the bar, and a couple of men who were nursing drinks. "Has Golightly arrived?"

A broad grin crossed Gus Hanley's wide face, and the others at the bar snickered. "His Lordship's secretary," announced Hanley, "reserved a room for His Highness for lunch and for receiving visitors. Mr. Golightly entered through the side door, in order to avoid undue contact with the rabble."

Pete Michaels hitched up his belt. "Now, gents," he said, "let's show real hospitality to this here Golightly—if we ever see him. Why, mebbe if we make a good impression on him, he'll invite us all out to his estate some weekend fer gopher-hunting."

There were a few chuckles at this, but Gaunt got the feeling that quite a bit of bitterness lay behind it. Rumor had it that Golightly had a great deal of money, and was considering the purchase of several small ranches up for

Jonathan Gaunt, editor.

sale, to consolidate them into one large enterprise. The editor knew as well as the others that ugly situations could easily devolve from this. Eastern syndicates had operated thus, in other communities, hiring efficient and ruthless men to manage the combines. Even where activities had been legal, hatred and violence often followed in the wake.

"If he wants to be a rancher, why don't he go to Australia?" Hanley said. "Hear tell there's plenty of opportunity there."

"Yeah," spoke up another man. "We ought to stop trouble before it starts. Let him know right off the bat that we don't cotton to his fancy ways, and he'd better learn what it's all about before he starts riding over us."

Steve Nichols, recently married, put it on the line. "Quite a few Britishers have come over, and some have become good citizens. If Golightly wants to do the same, he's welcome."

THE EDITOR ordered a short beer, and said, "Well, I'm interviewing him for the *Gazette,* and I'll sound him out in the process. If he's willing to take good advice, I think I can offer some."

The door to the side room opened, and a little man in a black coat came out. He stood there for a moment, then asked, "Has Mr. Gaunt arrived?"

Jonathan Gaunt identified himself, finished his beer, then accompanied the little man through the door and down the short hall to the private room. As he entered, he noticed a tall man sitting in a large wicker chair by the table, his back to the door. Only the back of his head and his hands were visible, but they were both evidence of the aristocrat.

The little man coughed. "Mr. Jonathan Gaunt, sir," he said.

"Very good, Lister," came a cultured-sounding voice. The hands gestured gracefully. "Pray make yourself comfortable, Mr. Gaunt. Will you join me in some refreshment? Brandy, perhaps?"

Gaunt accepted the offer; he seated himself and studied the Englishman as Golightly instructed his secretary to order two brandies, and silently indicated a box of cigars on the table. The editor saw a well-built man of medium height, tastefully but not appropriately dressed for this country. "That will be all until I ring, Lister," the man added. Gaunt noticed a small bell lying face-down on the table. The secretary withdrew.

"I have found, Mr. Gaunt, that the press here is somewhat different from what I have been accustomed to; but I want to learn your ways, so I am happy to give you an interview. In fact, there are a number of matters I wish to discuss with you, as I assume that you are well-informed on county affairs."

The editor smiled. "It's my business to keep in touch with things."

The door opened, and Ollie, Gus Hanley's assistant, came in with a tray. Golightly, glanced slightly in the bartender's direction, without raising his

head. He nodded and waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal.

"Quite," he said, smiling faintly. "If it is possible, I should prefer to settle in Jessamy Flats, inasmuch as the climate is more desirable for my health. So I shall not be an absentee landlord, and shall be living among strangers and among customs largely strange to me." He lit a cigar.

"I need, therefore, honest and capable managers; my own knowledge of the cattle-business is slight. I want men who not only know how to put a large ranch on a paying basis, but can also maintain good relations and good will with other ranchers, and with the community in general. Unnecessary ill-feeling can often be avoided if one takes care in the very beginning." He raised his glass. "Your health, sir."

Jonathan Gaunt returned the toast heartily.

JIM RODGERS read a proof-sheet with a satisfied smile on his face. "Now, that's what I call good clean copy," he said admiringly. "Yep, you can see that a first class printer set this type."

Jonathan Gaunt took the sheet from his hand with a raised eyebrow. "Ah, yes good and clean. Now all you need is accuracy." He indicated the well-worn dictionary on the bench. "Let me recommend to you, sir, Mr. Webster—whose notions of spelling may be somewhat less progressive than yours, but are at least in accord with those of our readers." He started to mark up the sheet, and Rodgers' face lengthened.

"Now Jawn," Rodgers protested, "you didn't spell 'financially' that way in your copy."

"Oh, but I did. Next time, try cleaning your glasses before you start setting type. There's no aid to a printer like good eyesight." He glanced out the window. "Hum, here comes the sheriff. Wonder what's up."

Rodgers shrugged. "Doesn't have to be anything stirring every time Asa walks down the street, does there?"

"Nope," Gaunt agreed. "There doesn't have to be—but when Asa walks along muttering to himself, there usually is. Think I'll head him off before he runs into something." He reached for his hat.

"Now, Jawn," complained the associate editor and printer, "you was just going to do your editorial; I can get the paper all ready to put to bed by tonight, and..."

Jonathan Gaunt picked up the dictionary and handed it to him. "Take some time off and learn a few common words." He stepped out onto the boardwalk before the other could reply. Jessamy Flats' lawman approached.

"Whoa there, Asa," Gaunt called out. "Settle down to a canter before you stampede, fellow." The smile on the editor's face vanished as Lyons came to a pause, lifted his head, and Gaunt saw the sheriff's expression.

Asa Lyons' usually ruddy face was almost ashen gray, and his brows were drawn into a tight knot. "Dang it," he muttered, "why didn't I sit back and let Ben Torley have this job last fall when he wanted to run against me?"

Jonathan Gaunt grasped the older man's arm. "Where you headed for?" he asked gently. "Is it as bad as you look, oldtimer?"

The sheriff nodded, and rubbed a knuckle against the end of his grey mustache. "Mean you haven't heard, Jonathan? Guess you're about the only one in town who hasn't, then. That English fellow—what's his name—yeah, Golightly. Well, it don't look as if he'll be going anywheres except into a pine box. He's been murdered! Somebody shoved a knife into him over at Hanley's."

Gaunt felt the breath go out of his lungs with a whoosh. "Good Lord!" He shook his head. "Why... I was talking to him just an hour ago. When did it happen?"

"Somewheres between then and five or ten minutes ago, unless you figured you were desperate for a news story, Jonathan." A wry smile crossed Lyons'

face. "Hell of a joker, ain't I?... Well, Gus Hanley found him dead and came over to my office in a tizzy. I calmed Gus down, then sent him back to keep an eye on things and make sure nobody disturbed anything. ...Torley *would* be out of town when this had to happen, and leave me short-handed. Oh well, who could know, huh?... As if I didn't have enough trouble with these robberies."

GUS HANLEY'S shirt was wringing wet; he mopped his brow with his sodden sleeve, looked around the room wildly, and repeated again in a hoarse voice, "I don't know a thing about it, Sheriff."

Lyons knuckled his moustache. "No one's accused you, Gus. Now just calm down and tell me how you happened to find him."

The barman sank into a chair as Jonathan Gaunt's eyes swept about the room. It was much the same as it had been an hour before. Golightly was still sitting in the wicker chair, his head sunk on his chest, one hand dangling limply—the only indication, outside of the haft of the knife that projected from his back that the man hadn't simply dozed off. A folded sheet of paper lay on the floor directly beneath his hand, mute testimony that he had been reading when the fatal thrust came. An open envelope on the table suggested that the Englishman had been reading a letter that had arrived on the noonday stage; this was reinforced by another unopened envelope beside it.

"Well," said Hanley. "Gaunt here arrived here around twelve-fifteen... Golightly was expecting him, and had just had lunch. A little while later, Lister here comes out and orders a couple of brandies."

The private secretary, looking still more shrunken than before, coughed discreetly, and said, "That is correct, Sheriff."

"So," Hanley went on, "I brought them in myself. Ollie, my relief man, hadn't arrived yet. Then after awhile Mr. Gaunt came out. I guess that was about one o'clock.... I was busy at the bar for quite a spell; then when things eased up a bit, I remembered that I hadn't cleared away the tray I'd brought in when Jonathan had been here. I knocked on the door, so's I wouldn't be walking in on him unexpected-like. It wasn't closed tight; it pushed open, and I saw him. Started to call out, when I saw that knife."

"Did you take the tray out then?" asked Gaunt.

"I...I don't remember, but I guess I must have; sort of automatic, I guess. It was like a bad dream, Jonathan. I can't swear to just what I did between then and the time that I went over to Asa's office, but I didn't lose any time getting there."

"Did you see Lister bringing the mail?"

"I came in the side door, sir," said the secretary. "I usually came and went that way unless there was some reason to go to the bar." His manner indicated that he preferred not to go into the saloon unless it was directly in his line of duty.

Lyons stooped and picked the sheet of paper from the floor, glanced at it. "Hmm, seems to be from some lawyer in New York. ...Nope; nothing of any use to us here." He picked up the unopened envelope on the table. "This one's from England. Pretty stamp. ...This was all you brought him?"

"These were all, sir," said Lister.

"And you didn't see anyone else go from the saloon into the hallway, huh?" asked Lyons.

Hanley shook his head. "No reason for anyone to...so I'd have noticed it if anyone had. Golightly was practically renting this room for himself, and the next to it for Lister."

THE SECRETARY spoke up nervously. "I was in the other room, after I brought Mr. Golightly's mail in. I heard someone go down the hall, but I assumed that it was Mr. Hanley."

"Would you have known if any-

one had come in the side door?" asked Gaunt.

Lister nodded. "I would have heard footsteps coming toward my room, sir; they would have had to pass it in order to get to Mr. Golightly's room. Besides, I usually kept my door somewhat ajar, so I would be sure to hear the bell if Mr. Golightly rang for me." ...He paused, looked at the still form of the Englishman, then gasped. "Good heavens! How could I have been so stupid?"

"What is it?" asked the sheriff.

"Mr. Golightly's diamond ring; it's gone!"

Lyons squinted. "Robbed, huh? Perhaps we'd better see if anything else is missing. Do you mind searching him, Lister?"

The little man trembled a little, but nodded his head; he approached the body gingerly, then began a brief examination of the cadaver. Gaunt walked slowly around the body, biting his lips. The knife that projected from the dead man's back was an ordinary bowie knife; no distinguishing marks on the handle that he could see. Someone had merely come up close and thrust swiftly. There was not much blood.

Lister said in a low voice, "He's been robbed, sir. His wallet is missing and his watch chain has been cut; the watch is gone, too. Whoever did it, put the chain back so that you couldn't see right away what had happened."

Jonathan Gaunt said, "How long have you been working for Mr. Golightly?"

"Oh, quite a few years, sir. He employed me when he was living in Liverpool; I have been with him ever since ...that would be around six and a half years."

"And...let me see, you have been in Jessamy Flats about three months?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Golightly employed you as his secretary?"

Lister confirmed this, adding that he had served Sir Gregory Stanton, Bart., up to the time of the latter's retirement. He had a sister in Liverpool. Mr. Golightly had spent a year or so in New York before coming west.

Lyons nodded. "Yeah, I noticed that the letter from England was forwarded from New York."

Jonathan Gaunt said, "It seems rather clear-cut, doesn't it, Sheriff?"

"Well, there wasn't any struggle. So it looks as if Golightly was expecting whoever it was who came in and killed him. Anyway, it must have been someone he was familiar with; he didn't even turn around when the party came in."

He cleared his throat. "I'm sorry, gents, but I'm going to have to hold both of you for questioning." He waved a hand as Lister started to protest. "Don't worry. If you're innocent, you won't be booked for anything at all...I mean, if we don't find enough to bring a formal charge."

The little man sputtered. "This... this is outrageous. I—I demand to see a lawyer at once. You can't hold me..."

"Not very long, perhaps. Matter of fact, Mr. Gaunt here can get lawyer Breadlowe for you. But I can hold you overnight, at least, and I'm going to do it. Now, will you come peacefully?"

JONATHAN GAUNT sighed and pushed the sheet of paper away from him. It was foolish, perhaps, to imagine that anything he wrote about the national situation could have any weight or meaning in shaping events. Yet, his duty was to speak the truth as he saw it, whether anyone believed him or not.

He reached out a hand and crumpled up the paper, threw it aside. "I missed the nail," he murmured, and sighed as his mind returned to the events of the day. No, the present business right here in Jessamy Flats must be cleared up first. "I'll be back later," he said to Rodgers. "And if I haven't done the editorial by morning, you can set up something by Walt Whitman to fill the space."

"Going to give Asa a hand, huh?"

"I have an idea—but maybe he's thought of it, too." He frowned. "And there's something else about this business that doesn't fit right."

Rodgers scratched his chin. "Doesn't look good for Hanley," he said. "After all, this here Golightly fellow wouldn't pay any attention to a saloon-keeper if he came into the room with a tray, would he? These fancy lords don't figure it's cricket to notice servants and serving folks."

Jonathan Gaunt nodded. "I'm afraid you're right, Jim; that's why it looks bad for Hanley." He looked up as the sheriff came in. "Hello, Asa; I was just going to drop over on you. Thought of a possibility..."

Lyons grunted. "Well, if you have any notions, better trot them out, Gaunt. We've searched a few rooms and we found Golightly's diamond ring and watch. Know where?"

"Hanley's?" asked Rodgers.

"Nope. We found them in Ollie's room. And not only that; we've found enough to pin those other robberies on Ollie, too."

Jonathan Gaunt snapped his fingers. "Ollie! What a fool, what a blind fool I've been. It was right under my nose and I didn't see it. Of course."

Lyons shook his head. "I don't know. I don't know, Jonathan. Robbery I can believe; the victims were all drunk and it wasn't any great job to roll them. But Ollie never stuck me as being the kind of man who'd go in for cold-blooded murder. And I don't think he'd use a knife, either..."

"Well," put in Rodgers, "sometimes you can't tell what a man's really like until the damage has been done." He looked at the editor. "Guess this sort of throws a monkey wrench into your notion, huh?"

Gaunt shook his head. "No—not necessarily. In fact, it's another link in the chain." He turned to Lyons. "Asa, you remember that row of hooks where Hanley hangs extra aprons and stuff?"

"Yeah."

"It's right near the hall. A person could slip in there and take an apron when no one was looking, don't you think?"

The sheriff fingers the end of his moustache. "Reckon they could, Jonathan. What does that add up to?"

"There's usually a spare apron hanging there," Gaunt went on. "I remember now. When I left this noon, after seeing Golightly, I noticed that there was no apron hanging on the hooks there; Gus and Ollie were both behind the bar. When I came back with you, Ollie was behind the bar; Gus was wearing his apron during the inquiry—and there was a third apron hanging on the hook."

"You mean someone borrowed the apron, then put it back?"

Jonathan Gaunt nodded. "That's the idea. ...Asa, let's have a little chat with Dan Caldwell over at the Post Office. Then I think maybe we can bring this whole business to a head."

OLLIE was saying dejectedly, "All right, I've admitted it. I robbed those cowboys when they were drunk ...put some knockout drops into their liquor. But I never killed anybody, and I never took that Englishman's ring and watch. What would I do with a ring and a watch anyhows—bury them somewhere and dig them up now and then to look at when no one was around? Anbody would know who they belonged to. I just stole folding money, that was all."

The three suspects were sitting dejectedly around the table in the sheriff's office. Ben Torley leaned against the wall, his guns ready for an instant draw. There was no way any of the three could make a break for freedom; both Gaunt and the sheriff were far enough from the table so that it would do no one any good to try to turn it over. There was nothing handy that could be used as a weapon.

Torley said, "Gus here admits that you stepped out a couple of times since noon, Ollie. Either time was long

enough—the first to do the killing, and the second to slip back to your room and stash away the loot. You didn't figure that anyone would suspect you and search your room so soon."

Ollie repeated doggedly, "I never left the bar, and I didn't do it. If I had, I wouldn't have admitted nothing at all. I'd have said it was all a frame-up. I know what I did and what I didn't do. You got me for robbery; I put knockout drops into those cowboys' drink and rolled them later, like I admitted."

"Well, Ollie," said Lyons, "if you're innocent of murder, then you won't mind taking a little test—nor will Gus or Mr. Lister. It's a simple thing." He stepped over to his desk opened the drawer and took out three pencils and a piece of paper which he tore into three pieces. "I just want the three of you to write down the sentence I'm going to dictate to you. The sentence has nothing to do with this murder." He passed a pencil and a piece of paper to each man. "Ready? ...Okay, here's the sentence. 'There are no roaches or bats in the jailhouse at Jessamy Flats?' "

The three suspects looked at him in bewilderment.

"Go ahead," urged the sheriff. "Write it down. It may help clear you of suspicion."

"Uh...how do you spell 'roaches'?" asked Ollie.

Lister smiled as he applied his pencil to the paper. "I doubt that this is a spelling-bee," he said. The other two followed suit, with somewhat less ease.

The sheriff waited until they were finished then took the three pieces of paper labelled each as he took it, and showed them to Gaunt. The editor nodded. "Yes," he said. "That is what I thought."

ASA LYONS smiled grimly. "Well, gents, the way the law works is slow and sometimes roundabout, but we keep on asking questions in hopes that somebody in a case like this will make a slip." He tapped the three pieces of paper. "These here wouldn't mean anything if one person hadn't made some slips before."

He cleared his throat. "The thing which struck Jonathan and me right off the bat was that whoever killed Mr. Golightly simply stepped up behind his chair and stuck a knife in him. without his ever suspecting anything was about to happen to him. Now, the first thing we thought of, of course. was the man who had the easiest access to Golightly—Mr. Lister.

"But there were a lot of things against that. First of all, how could Lister have concealed a bowie knife on his person? Second, why would he do it in the first place? It didn't seem likely that anyone who'd been a man's private secretary so long would suddenly commit murder—and I couldn't see a English private secretary using a knife, anyway."

Lister said, "Really, Sheriff, such things are not done."

"Gus Hanley was never a very good suspect," Lyons continued. "The only thing that linked him in at all was the fact that he might have had the chance to do it. He said he discovered Golightly dead; well, he might have made the discovery right after stabbing him. The thing against Hanley as our killer was simply the question of what he had to gain. Golightly was a first-class paying guest, worth much more to Hanley alive than dead. And the dead man's watch and ring were so individual that the thief couldn't wear them, and they'd have been too much trouble to get rid of."

Hanley said, "I've been doing all right, Sheriff. I never needed money that bad."

Lyons turned to the little assistant. "Ollie, here, just didn't strike me as right for the murderer, either. But then, something Jonathan mentioned to me—and something Jim Rodgers said as I was stepping into the newspaper office—made me think along a different trail. Ollie was perfect for the

frame-up victim. Whether the killer knew that Ollie had been robbing drunks isn't too important; the general setup was such that once we found the loot—Golighty's ring and watch—in Ollie's room, we were supposed to conclude he was behind the whole works, and that Golightly was killed for his ring and gold watch."

He turned to Lister. "If I recollect right, you said that you and Mr. Golightly were in New York for a few months, and you implied that you'd come there from England. Is that right?"

The secretary nodded. "That is correct, Sheriff."

"And you said you've been a private secretary in England just about all your working life—is that right?"

The other nodded again.

Lyons sighed. "You know, Lister, that's very interesting. Because Mr. Gaunt here tells me that they don't have private secretaries in England. That is, they aren't called private secretaries; they're called confidential clerks."

Lister flushed. "Well...er, yes; you're right, Sheriff. I am a confidential clerk. But Mr. Golightly and I had been in New York a little while; we found out that the American term for my position was 'private secretary'. Mr. Golightly wanted to acclimate himself as soon as possible, so he charged me with dropping the term 'confidential clerk'. It wasn't easy, I assure you."

"And I suppose you've become pretty familiar with American jails, during your travels."

"Really," Lister protested. "I object to that remark; I do, indeed. This is my first visit to a jail."

"I see," said Gaunt. "But then you've written about them quite a bit."

"Certainly not!" The little man seemed indignant at the thought.

"You know," said the editor, "I think you're going to have trouble convincing a jury of quite a few things. You say you've lived in England all your life, until recently; you've had no experience in visiting or writing about American jails. Yet," he waved the slip of paper, "you spell 'jailhouse' here 'j-a-i-l house'; while an Englishman spells it 'g-a-o-l house'."

THE LITTLE man's mouth worked frantically, but no words came out. The sheriff cocked his head, and pointed a finger.

"You and Ollie here are about the same size, same build and height. Now if a man was sitting in a chair when you came into a room, just turned around and took a quick glance, without looking up at your face...the way Jonathan tells me Golightly did when someone came in...he might think you were Ollie, *if you were wearing a bartender's apron.*

"It was a simple job for you. You knew that Golightly paid no attention to servants; you'd seen the way he just glanced around quickly when Gus or Ollie came in. He saw their apron and that was just about all; he probably never knew what either one really looked like. So, when you came in, wearing the apron you'd taken from the hook, Golightly never realized it was *you* at all. It was easy for you to slip up behind his chair and stab him with the bowie knife you'd concealed beneath your borrowed apron. Taking his watch and ring, and planting them in Ollie's room was no job, either."

Lister now bore a look of affronted dignity. "I say that you are balmy, sheriff—or loco, as I have heard it put out here. Why should I want to kill Mr. Golightly after all these years?"

Jonathan Gaunt took an envelope out of his inside pocket. "A good question. That stumped us until the sheriff and I thought of a possible answer; and when we thought of it, it wasn't too hard to find evidence.

"First of all, you haven't been with Golightly for many years; he engaged you in New York. Second, you're not English. Third, you were afraid that he had discovered, or was about to discover, that you are well-known in

the New York underworld as a thief." He waved the envelope. "We have here the one letter you did not manage to abstract from old Caldwell at the Post Office, Mr. Abe Ellister."

JONATHAN GAUNT stretched and handed a sheet of paper to Jim Rodgers. "Here it is," he said. "The editorial for today's *Gazette*."

Sheriff Asa Lyons smiled slowly. "All about this case, huh?"

The editor shook his head. "Nope, that's covered in a short news-story which gives you all the credit, Asa. The editorial's about the President. A lot of folks are beginning to blame General Grant for the mess in Washington, and that isn't right. We're not living under a king or an emperor who makes all the laws, and decides what the policies will be, with the people having nothing to say about it.

"The people run this country, Asa. They elect the congress, and they can clean things up by turning out officials who aren't interested in the public welfare. When a crook's been elected to office, it's up to the voters to get rid of him, to exercise their power and accept responsibility for their share of mistakes—not to try to blame the President for everything that goes wrong. We all know that General Grant's as honest a man as we've ever had in the White House; it's up to us to see to it that he gets the right kind of support from the right kind of representatives in Congress."

Luke Torley nodded. "Yeah, I guess you're right there, Jonathan. When we citizens have the power, it's up to us to use it right. ...But how did you figure out this business about Lister?"

"Well," said Gaunt, "it wasn't much more than a hunch at first, and I couldn't see any way to work it out. But I got to talking with Caldwell, and he told me that Lister was always Johnny-on-the-spot when the mails came in— Lister was real helpful, as a matter of fact. Caldy don't see so well, so he was happy to get a little help. As a result, Lister went through the mail before Caldwell saw it.

"But strangely enough, Lister never seemed to get any mail himself, never asked about any, either. That sounded as if he either knew he wouldn't get any, or got mail under a different name. It was just a bad break that this particular letter fell down behind Caldy's desk, and Lister didn't know anything about it. It was plumb good luck for us that his gal back East was writing him, and saying a lot of indiscreet things."

The sheriff lit a cigaret. "Well, it's all out now; he's confessed. He decided to break away from the gang and get himself in a good position. He came across this fellow Golightly through his connections, heard that the Englishman wanted a private secretary, so passed himself off as a Britisher himself. Had first class references forged, and studied up on how to behave. It worked fine until he made a few slips, and Golightly began to suspect something wasn't right.

"And how could he know that Ollie had never been away from the bar that whole afternoon, because Gus didn't want to take a chance on his making a bad impression on Golightly. Good thing we talked Gus into not giving the show away when we said he had admitted that Ollie had stepped out a couple of times that afternoon."

★

Coming Next Issue

SIXGUN STRANGER

by Mat Rand

On a hot day such as this one was, Sheriff Garrett would have preferred to sit at his chessboard. But a man had been reported missing by his brother, and a dead man had been seen on the outskirts of town ...

THE BOLTER

by Lauran Paine

SAM GARRETT had been appointed to fill the unexpired year of the late Sheriff Ogden's term. Clarence Ogden was a stubborn, roughshod man, and it had only been a matter of time before he got it. The amazing thing was that he'd been around for so many years. Forty seven of them, to be exact, but finally he'd crossed a half-drunk gunman and they went to hell together; the renegade with a .44 slug squarely between the eyes and Ogden with a .45 missile directly through the heart.

Sam Garrett hadn't wanted the sheriff's job, in particular, but he did have an inherent desire to eat regularly, and the pay wasn't bad—although sometimes the job was. Sam was medium sized, good natured, shrewd and affable. He moved slowly and talked the same way. He was only thirty years old, but already his face was indelibly stamped with the little lines that come early to faces in the hot, arid desert country.

Sam straightened up the sheriff's office under the disapproving but silent watchfulness of Deputy Peters, a middle-aged, washed-out-looking man who had learned his trade under Ogden, and didn't approve of any approach to any subject that wasn't blunt, hard and tactless.

The two men were sitting at a time-consuming game of chess, when the first complaint under the new regime came in. Augustin Santos, whose actual first name was Epifanio, and whose nick-name, by the way, was Pifas—why Pifas instead of Fanny, only a Mexican could tell—came in.

"Senor Sheriff?" Sam nodded self consciously. "It is my brother. She don't has been home for couple days."

Sam cleared his throat, looked at Deputy Peters, but saw no encouragement on that craggy old face, and sighed audibly. "Well, maybe he's under some sagebrush somewhere sleeping off an overload of tequila."

Santos' face looked horrified. "But no, Senor Shereef. Mi brother, she ees a meenestair of th' Holy Tumblers of Eesreal. No Senor Shereef, he don't dreenk for nothing." Up went two leather colored hands as Augustin warmed to his subject, "No, por Dios; hijo mano, mi—"

Sam's face was pained as he interrupted. "Pifas, look, either stick to Senor or to Sheriff, but dammit, don't call me both of 'em at the same time. It's silly, an' besides, they don't mix."

Santos was caught in mid-stride. He let the breath he had stored up come out in a long, sibilant hiss. Senor Sheriff, Sheriff Senor, what's the difference? He shrugged resignedly and looked a little crestfallen that he hadn't had a chance to really unlimber.

"But my brother, Senor, what of heem?"

Sam nodded and rubbed a calloused hand along his jaw. "Yeah, what of him? That's a fair question. What the hell of him? Does he have a girl hid out somewhere? Did he skip Arizona and beat it back to Mexico? Does he owe a lot of money? Give me something to go on, Augustin."

Pifas shrugged again, but with eloquent bewilderment this time. "I do not know, Senor. All I can told you ees that he leaves on hees horse a few or three days ago, Senor, an' don't come back when he was supposed to. My wife has the dineer ready for him, but he don't come on."

Sam frowned. "Where was he going?"

Again the shrug. "Thees I don't know, too, Senor."

Sam began to get exasperated. "Just what in hell *do* you know?"

Santos smiled innocently and his words cut like a knife. "That you are supposed to be the Sheriff, Senor."

Sam reddened and looked closely to see if Augustin meant it the way it sounded, and was conscious of Deputy Peters' smug smile. "All right, Augustin, you go on home. If anything pops up, I'll let you know."

SANTOS left with a lop-sided smile that showed a complete lack of confidence in the new sheriff, and Sam turned back to the pinochle game.

"Just what do you do with the likes of that?"

Peters grunted offhandedly and let his teeth slip off the ragged, chewed ends of his long, grey mustache just long enough to answer. "Pay it no attention. Them Mexs is always disappearin' or somethin', then the first thing you know, they're back." He cautiously made a move, but kept his fingers tight on the pawn, beady eyes probing for danger to his man. "Anyway, none of 'em'll ever tell you the truth, so askin' around won't get you nowhere." For a long time there was silence as the game progressed slowly, laboriously, then the front door flew open and two men entered. Sam and his deputy swivveled around, irritated at the interruption.

"Are you the sheriff hereabouts?" The speaker was florid, loud and overly dressed. He was speaking to Peters. Without answering, the deputy jerked a thumb toward Sam. The important looking stranger looked his surprise. "Hell, you ain't old enough to be a sheriff."

Sam was nettled. "Mister, if you came in here to discuss age, come back when we're not in the middle of a game of chess." He turned back to the board and Peters' old face was wreathed in a grimace of approval that might have been termed a smile by a very loose application of the description.

The stranger apparently wasn't used to being spoken to in that fashion. His face reddened, his eyes widened and he glowered at the indifferent lawman. "Damn you, sir! I'm Colonel Fawcett, owner of the 87 Ranch north of Guadelupe, here, and this is my foreman, Mister Elliot. I do not propose to be insulted by any young whelp—"

Peters was on his long, lean legs and his eyes were ugly. "Listen, you windy old goat, one more peep out of you an' I'll pistol whip you so's your own mother won't know you! Now, damn your lights, if you've business here, say so; if not, get to hell out!"

Fawcett and his foreman were furious, but no sane man could mistake the murder latent in the old deputy's eyes. Colonel Fawcett looked as though he was on the verge of a stroke; his

eyes bulged, his assorted chins quivvered and his fists were clenched. Peters stared them both down, however, and the Colonel finally let his air out and began again, in a tone that was almost civil; quite a concession for him, at that.

"Mister Elliot, here, found a dead Mexican out on our range. 'Been shot, near as we can tell," he smiled wryly, apologetically. "Apparently he's been there, under the hot sun, for two or three days, so we didn't get too close to him."

Peters' eyes were cold. "Then just how in hell do you know he's shot?"

The Colonel frowned testily, looked at Peters' face, swallowed and forced a poor imitation of a smile. " 'Couldn't, exactly. As a matter of fact, we just guessed at it. You see—"

Peters arose as he interrupted. "We'll go out an' look him over. We can do our own guessin'. Whereabouts is the corpse?"

The Colonel described the spot by landmarks where the body was. Deputy Peters wrote them down in a large, ungrammatical script, nodded toward the door with obvious intent, and spoke: "We'll get out there as soon as the sheriff sees his way clear."

The Colonel and his shadow-like foreman left with red faces, but contrite bearing, as Sam looked at his deputy in amazed admiration. He had been fascinated throughout the drama at Peters' ability to puncture the Colonel's balloon, something he wouldn't have thought of doing.

"Well, I'll be damned. Say, Peters, you hadn't ought to've talked to that Colonel like that." His voice didn't sound very emphatic.

"Damned old stuffed shirt," Peters growled. "In my day, I've seen 'em all, an' I know his type as far as I can see 'em." He looked squarely at Sam. "Are we goin' out an' look at that dead Mex?"

Sam shrugged. "What else can we do? You said we'd be out."

Peters colored a trifle and his back stiffened. In silence, the two men put an old newspaper over the chess board, not without a touch of reverence, closed up the office and went out back to the corral, where they saddled up.

THE TRIP to the 87 Ranch was singularly uneventful. Usually a frantic lizard, a startled rabbit or something of that nature will break the monotony of a long ride; occasionally a rattlesnake will direct attention his way—and perhaps a bullet—by buzzing his flat, sinister warning. But Peters and Garrett rode the long, hot miles with nothing more to interest them than one another's company.

Finally they arrived where Peters thought they should strike out across the close cropped range. The sheriff grunted something unintelligable and followed his deputy across the rolling acres of cattle browse. Peters went to the spot with only one pause to consult his directions, which he had one helluva time figuring out, even though he had written them himself.

Suddenly they came onto the body. There were horse tracks and the peculiar little disjointed marks of high heeled boots all around the corpse, however, none seemed to approach closer than twenty feet. The Mexican lay on his face as though asleep. Peters dismounted, gritted his teeth resolutely, and went up to make a close inspection. Sheriff Garrett came on more reluctantly, inasmuch as the corpse did not have a body odor resembling ambrosia by any stretch of the imagination. The deputy eased one boot toe under the dead man's stiff arm and lifted the body, which moved all in one solid piece, and flipped the Mexican over onto his back.

The deputy grunted and his mouth pulled down into a saturnine expression. "Yeah; he was shot alright. By a horse."

Sheriff Garrett went up close, squinted his eyes, although that didn't help much, and looked. There were two clearly defined imprints of a horse's shoes on his chest.

Deputy Peters backed off with ap-

preciable finality. "Kicked to death. It happens every now and then."

Sam Garrett said nothing until he was back on his long legged grulla ridging, then his observation was confined to a simple but expressive: "Phew!"

•

The ride back to the office in Guadalupe was as uninteresting as the ride out. They were unsaddling behind the office when Garrett turned to Peters. "Where do you reckon we could find that feller Santos? That dead Mex might be his missing brother."

Peters smiled in his disillusioned, acid way and pulled on his grey, coffee-stained walrus mustache. "Shouldn't be hard. Let's just start at *Manuel's Saloon, Tres Milpas*, and keep going in an' out of the Mex saloons until we locate him."

Sam thought it was a fine idea, especially since it was as hot as the hubs of hell outside. And there never was a Mexican saloon where the drinks weren't murderous, but the interior cool.

In silent sobriety, the sheriff and his deputy started out. Neither spoke a word of Spanish, although their lives had been spent in the Southwest. They knew, however, that a badge and a cold eye were a language all to themselves, among any people, anywhere, and while neither were drinking men, they naturally had to sample the virtue of Mexican beer, *cerbeza,* or injure international relations. Consequently, by the time they got to *Angel's Chingadaro Cantina,* they were both jovial and sentimental. Here, too, they found Augustin Santos, although neither was particularly anxious to see him.

"Ah, mi compadres, Senor Shereef an' Senor Dapooty, que dice, comitas?"

Sam laid a restraining hand on Santos' fleshy shoulder. "Remember; either one or the other, but, dammit, not both. Sheriff or Senor, but not Senor Sheriff."

"Si, Senor Shereef, eet ees as you say." Augustin shrugged and smiled unctiously. "Thees theeng ees as you weesh."

Sam smiled a little lopsidedly. "Say, Pifas, this brother of yours. What kind of a horse did he ride?"

Pifas shrugged apologetically. "No Mexican would be seen on hees horse, Senor Shereef. Eet was a bondle of bones held together weeth a moth-eaten old skeen of bay color." He shrugged. "Bot mi hermano, hee was no rider either, so eet makes no difference to heem."

"Was his old horse plumb gentle?"

"Who knows, Senors, what caballo ees plomp gentle? Maybe today, maybe tomorrow, but what of the next day?"

Sam nodded as his earthen mug was poured full of cool beer. That was right. The gentlest of horses can fire under circumstances that make him lose his self control. He drank the beer and Augustin Santos watched him with interest.

"Why do you ask of my brother's caballo?"

Sam faced Augustin and smiled greasily, "Tell me, Pifas, was your brother dark—darker than you are—about this high," he put his hand up to his nose, "and with a knife scar from his left ear to his cheekbone?"

Santos stiffened. "Si, mi jefe, he was as you describe heem. Then you have found heem!" His liquid dark eyes assumed a forlorn expression. "Then I most prepare myself."

SAM'S WATERY eye was lazily watching the Mexican. "Yep, we found him." His voice was clear and brutal. " 'Ever smell a dead man after he's been under the broiling sun for a couple or three days, Pifas?"

The Mexican looked a little lighter than was his normal color. "No, Senor. Thees is my brother you talk of?"

"Yeah." Sam turned to his deputy, who thought the entire conversation was foolish. "Deputy Peters, take this

man over to the office. I've got an errand to run, then I'll be over an' we can talk."

Peters looked undecidedly at his employer, hesitated the briefest part of a minute before he ducked his head in begrudging agreement, "Alright. I'll be along in a few minutes."

Sam's eye was coldly commanding. "Now, Deputy Peters, right damned now!"

Peters' face flamed red and his eyes were unpleasant. He regarded Sam's unswerving glance for a long moment, gritted his teeth and nodded again. "Come on, Santos, let's go over to the calaboose an' wait around for the sheriff."

Sam went to the blacksmith's shop, was there not over ten minutes, then hurried over to his office. Deputy Peters was sitting in sulky silence propped against a wall reading, or attempting to read, a local handbill. Santos was studying some wanted posters stuck on the wall, one over the other because there was no other place to put them.

Sheriff Garrett came in, ignored Peters, sat down at his desk and swivveled around. "Have a chair, Augustin." Santos sat. "Now tell me something; just why in hell did you kill your brother?"

Both Santos and Peters looked at him wide-eyed. The deputy's chair came off the wall and stopped jarringly as Peters regarded Sam, open mouthed.

"Come on, Santos. Why'd you do it?"

There were sudden beads of perspiration on the Mexican's upper lip and between the creases of his forehead. His large eyes were startled and frantic.

"No, Senor Sheriff, thees you cannot believe. Madre de Dios. A man does not kill hees own hermano." The horror and deep righteousness in the man's voice almost shook Sam's convictions.

"Dammit, Pifas. I know how you did it, but I want to know why. Now you either open up or it'll be doggone hard for you."

There was an edge of desperation in the sheriff's voice that neither his startled deputy nor the accused man understood. Sheriff Garrett was on his first case and if he miffed it, it would undoubtedly be his last chance to practice being the sheriff of Guadalupe County.

Augustin Santos looked desperately at the Deputy, but Peters wasn't even conscious of his existence. The deputy was certain that his new superior had somehow or other lost his mental equilibrium and was fascinated by seeing his first insane person.

"Ah, Senor Shereef, my brother's horse must have bolted weeth heem. Thees can happen, you know yourself." There was fear and perplexity in the Mexican's voice. "Si, perhaps he was even dragged to death, or maybe thees horse threw heem an' keeked heem as he fell. Thees too can happen, as you know."

Sam was sure now. "Santos," his voice was calmly menacing now, "I'll give you one minute to open up, then you're goin' into a cell an' I won't help you if a necktie party comes."

Santos turned even paler. He knew the temper of the Guadalupanas. His face was covered with perspiration and his hands were clenched together. "Si, Senor Shereef, I deed theese theeng." He swore in the vernacular jargon, colorful and blisteringly descriptive, of his ancestors. "That damned meeneestair, he was makeen' for my wife. She was goeen' to leave me for heem. Those puerco, he was preecheen' all the time an' steeleen' mi mujer on the sides." Peters' eyes bugged out and his mouth dropped open a notch farther. Sam smiled smugly and breathed a great big sigh of relief.

"I followed my brother until he was way out een the country, then I treecked heem into geteen off hees horse an' I heet heem with a theeng I made that was made to look like two horse shoes. Thees I deed so everyone

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OWLHOOT LEGEND

by Glen Monroe

There was this fabulous outlaw, Little Joe, who apparently couldn't be killed — and the almost-equally fabulous Willie-the-Wolf Vanning, who was deadly poison. Now the pair were about to join up. But there was also a third legendary figure in the offing, a lawman named Yucca Harker, who had sworn he'd get Little Joe, and all the lawless coyotes holed up with him.

WHEN SAM COTTERELL drifted into the ramshackle bar in Skeleton, he had a grimy bandage knotted about his left wrist. What he told in explaining it mightn't have passed without suspicion if Cotterell wasn't well-known in the ghost town by the abandoned mine workings. But he was one of them, wanted himself on a horse-thief charge across the state line. Some of them remembered when he went under the handle of Boyne.

"It happened up in Hogarty's Gulch," he told them. "There I was a-minding my own business, and these deputies come a-busting into the place and jumped this Willie-the-Wolf Vanning. And one of the stray slugs nicked me—me, an innercent bystander."

"Willie-the-wolf Vanning?" the drink wrangler said. "Who is he?"

Cotterell looked superior. "Well, it seems he's one slicker-'n-hell trigger-tough. Got a real rep. One of the gents there was telling me afterwards that he was in Big Lode the night Willie busted the bank open single-handedly. They say he's plumb nervy and a lead-slammin' fool in the bargain."

"Did the deputies get him?"

"Get Willie-the-wolf?" Cotterell snorted. "Are you locoed? He's a big potato." Cotterell was a man with news and very superior about it. "He smoked it out with them and got to a flight of stairs and up it. When they finally rushed it, he was gone. Had jumped to the roof of the next door place and made his getaway. And on the way he robbed the till of the store beneath. He's a real *malo hombre*, friends!"

The bar boss cocked an eyebrow. "You talk like you was a bosom pard of the fella. I bet you never heard of him till—"

"Minute I saw him I remembered having run into him over at Sojo a coupla years back! Sure I know about Willie-the-Wolf!"

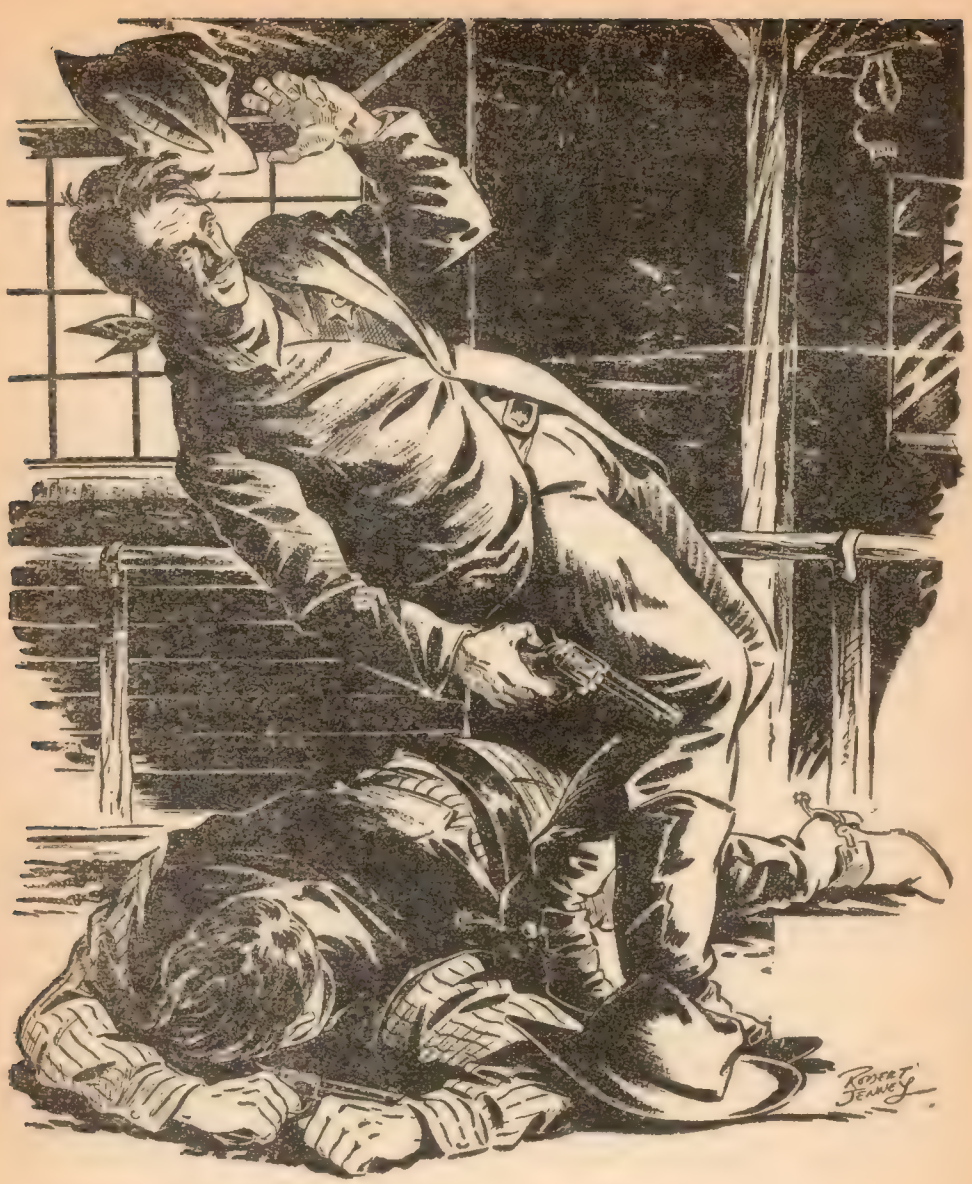
"Sure," said one of the barroom toughs, edging over hopefully as Cotterell threw down a bill for another drink. "Sam's right. He's been around and knows. I heard of this Willie-the-Wolf more'n once. Why, isn't he the one who smoked it out with Clay Allison of the Washita once?"

"Seems to me I remember hearing about that," Cotterell said.

"Well, the name—Vanning—it *is* sorta familiar," the barman finally admitted. He slid his eyes toward the tall bony man with the sun-seared hawkish face stretching in the back doorway of the room but got no signal. "Yeah, Cotterell. . . Uh-huh."

Cotterell drained his drink and bit off a corner of a chewing tobacco plug. "That Yucca Harker showed yet?" he asked.

Heads shook negatively. That was the real big news in Skeleton, the thing they were waiting for. Yucca Harker was a special State officer, appointed by the governor. He was supposed to be one of the fastest men clearing holster leather of gun-steel ever seen in the state, and a hard-case relentless hellion on law-break-



ers. He had already shot it out with the Bloody Basin bunch and sent the living remnants of it fleeing south of the Line. He had killed the notorious Blackie Bottomley, the train robber, getting Bottomley when he was flanked by two of his bunch. And he had taken in Al Custer, the killer. Custer had advertised for years that he would never be taken alive; but when he saw that this walking hound of Hell, Yucca Harker, had him dead to rights, and it would be an even draw, Custer had surrendered.

That was the payoff, when Custer refused to smoke it out with Harker, face-to-face. Men knew how tough Harker was then.

Now word had drifted down the state that Yucca Harker had served notice he was going to clean out Skeleton, a lobo's nest. More particularly that meant he would have it out with Little Joe, the king killer of Skeleton, and the man reputed to be a gun ghost.

Even most of the scum and ragtail in Skeleton didn't know exactly who Little Joe was. When he was called

out for a showdown he appeared with a crimson bandana covering the lower half of his face. When challenged by a lawman, he never failed to appear; he seemed to delight in being called out.

The strangest thing was the story that he couldn't be killed. He wore a long gray coat that extended to below his knees when he faced a man, wore it buttoned tightly across his chest. And that coat was supposed to be bullet-proof; an oldtimer had seen him struck dead-center, and go down before he was toted off by his men. But that night he had walked into the lone bar of Skeleton, roaring drunkenly, and apparently unhit. A deputy from Jacob's Hill swore he had put lead in both Little Joe's legs before Little Joe fled into a hoeman's house, whence his bunch rescued him. But the next day this Little Joe had gone swaggering down Skeleton's dismal street flanked by old caved-in houses, legs as sound as any man's.

"He ain't human," they said. "Nobody can kill him. Not with that coat on... They tell he got something from an old Injun medicine man..."

It was locoed, but hard to disprove. Three John Laws had come to Skeleton with the avowed intention of ending the days of the killer, whose depredations up and down the line were a state scandal. Two of them had marched down the road to meet him and died. The third had fled, wounded, but claiming he had put at least two slugs into Little Joe—fatal wounds, too, he swore. Two nights later, Little Joe had walked into that peace officer's office and shot him as he lay on his cot.

THAT WAS the man they said Yucca Harker was coming to settle with. Harker, who rode without a posse himself.

"Maybe he ain't a-coming," somebody said.

The drink wrangler shook his head. "That Harker, he ain't never failed to show yet once he's given notice he's after a man! That's part of his game, some folks claim. He announces he's going to hang the deadwood on a certain party and figures to find the gent's nerve broken when he does walk in. He'll come."

Another day passed and there was no word of Harker around the country. "Maybe he tangled with that Willie-the-Wolf," somebody said.

"You mean that Vanning?" said a newcomer who had stopped off, passing through. He had the gunslinger stamp plain on him, had already inquired if any badge-packers had been snooping around of late.

"You know him, pilgrim?" said the cadaverous hawk-faced man, shifting his chair where he had been drowsing in a corner. He signalled for a drink and the bar boss blew out his store teeth saying, "Sure, Janson, sure. Right away!"

"Heard of him," the stranger admitted. He drew a sack of makin's from the pocket of his crimson shirt. "Friend of mine, Dooty Hare, knew Vanning when he operated up in the Yellow Horse Hills. Coupla days back I heard Vanning—Willie-the-Wolf—held up a stage on the Rincon Trail. Right smack on the edge of the town, too. They were dumfounded because he had stolen a hoss in Rincon the day before, and nobody figured he'd be that close. He's a hunk of poison for fair!" He spat. "He's nervy all right. Proud, sorta. Wears a red silk neckerchief at his throat—and won't take it off even though it'll give him away."

The lank Janson rose and stretched, dusty hat rubbing against the rafters of the low-ceiled place. "Sometimes a gent gets himself a big rep by runnin' off at the mouth a heap."

Red Shirt shook his head. "Couldn't be that way with Willie-the-Wolf. He got wounded in the throat once and can't talk much above a loud whisper; so he don't waste much time in bragging. Gimme a stogie 'fore I go, mister."

IT WAS LATE that night when One-Eye Gorty, who ran a little horse ranch up at the crossing to the north, rode in. He had news, double-barrelled news. A couple of deputies had been at his place, wanted to know if he had seen hide or hair of Willie-the-Wolf. They claimed Vanning was wounded, and in trouble, and alone—he couldn't go much further.

He also had chatted with a passing patent medicine drummer. Yucca Harker was getting close en route to Skeleton, this man told—keeping his presence a secret. But the drummer had recognized him in the Travellers House over at Fesson City.

"What did he look like?" Janson asked, glancing up from a dog-eared solitaire layout at a side table.

"He didn't say. And I—well, I forgot to ask," Gorty admitted weakly.

Janson spat out his cold stub of cigaret disgustedly. "A chunkhead's born every minute," he said to nobody in particular. "By grab, Gorty, how would you like him to clean out Skeleton? What would you do? You never traded in honest ponies in your whole life!"

"To clean out Skeleton he'd have to get Little Joe fust," said Lowery, the pot-bellied, slope-shouldered man who ran the two-bit feed lot and barn outfit in the town. For an hombre who often didn't do a whole piece of business in a week, Lowery always had a chunk of dinero on him. "This Yucca Harker's dangerous, though; he's slick as slobbers, they tell. Gimme another bottle, Gus; I'm going home and bed down."

He was still awake in his bed in the office of his livery stable, the bottle half empty on the chair beside him, when he heard hard-drumming hoofs on the night. He hauled a Colts from under his yellowed pillow as he sat up, trained ear attuned. That pony was foundered and limping in the bargain; he wouldn't be able to go much further.

Then the animal was driving along Skeleton's single wandering street. There was a break in the hoofbeats, and Lowery heard them coming down the alley to his barn. He was out of bed and downstairs in the dark barn, peering through a knothole as the rider dropped off. The latter hammered desperately on the barn door.

"Let me in, for the lovva Gawd!" the rider husked on the night. The desert wind parted the tree tops overhead and moonlight seeped through. Lowery saw a slight figure, powdered with dust, beside the head of a bogged-down dun cayuse. The man was hatless, his sandy hair ringed with a dirty strip of bandage. "I got dinero! Let me in!" He began to kick the door.

Lowery lighted a lantern and stood it just inside the small door before he unbarred it. Then he called for the rider to enter and faded back into the dimness, gun cocked. The man stepped over the threshold and into the barn, blinking, swaying on his boot-heels.

"Hell, where are you?" he cried in a hoarse whisper, pawing at the red silk neckerchief at his throat as if he were choking.

And Lowery knew he was looking at this Willie-the-Wolf Vanning he had heard so much about.

"What do you want?" Lowery called.

"You gotta hide me! I'm Willie-the-Wolf... A damn posse is hard on my tail. I—" His whispering voice died as he slumped against a post.

"What did you come here for?"

"Hell! I heard there were gents in this hole who'd give a hand to a hairpin like me. I can always return a favor in—in a real way." He seemed completely exhausted.

A GUN SPAT on the night in the distance outside the cemetery-like stillness of the ghost town. Lowery came out of the dimness. The Wolf had thumbed a couple of shells from his belt and was trying to insert them fumblingly into his weapon. The hol-

ster of the second gun was empty; he seemed completely helpless.

"All right. Get your hoss inside." said Lowery as he swung open one of the big doors. Willie-the-Wolf half dragged the glassy-eyed horse; it had a limp in its left foreleg.

Through the opening of the door, Lowery saw two riders appear on a hump beyond the ghost town. "That's them," croaked the Wolf.

"Two?" Lowery spat in disgust. "Hell, I thought you were a *malo hombre,* Vanning! A posse of two—"

Vanning pointed at his head bandage. "I can't see so good right now; can't see more than a few yards. By tomorra I'll be all right, though; then I'll cut down some of them damn badge-packers, by grab!"

Lowery paused only a moment, thinking, after he closed the door. Then he led the pony to the rear of the barn. The two unsaddled the animal quickly. Lowery sent it hobbling out into the feed lot behind. He told Vanning he could hide himself out in the feed lot.

"But if they sashay in here and find you, I don't know nothin'. I was blind drunk and you slipped in and hid yourself. *Sabe?"*

Willie-the-Wolf Vanning spat drily before he dragged himself up the ladder. "If they catch me, I won't be answering any questions afterward, because they'll never take me alive," he husked in that whispering voice. "Soon as they chucked me in a cuartel, that Yucca Harker would come around and cut out my heart—the slow way."

"You know him?"

"I killed his brother," Vanning said. Then he mounted unsteadily, finally pitching from sight in the loft. "They might not come around," he called down faintly despite the stillness. "There was a rider sloping off south as I cut inta here. Mebbe-so they're trailing him now."

Lowery waited a while. Then he climbed to the loft and heard the Wolf's heavy, slow breathing, saw him where he lay like one dead, half under the hay, gun clutched in his bony hand, large and powerful for a slight-built man. Lowery went down and slipped out the back and moved off among the sage clumps in the sand-hills at the edge of the town. He figured he had been pretty smart. Little Joe could always use a gent like Willie-the-Wolf in his camp...

It was chill and heavily overcast the next afternoon when Lowery and the haggard-faced Vanning moved down to Skeleton's lone barroom. Spasmodic sprays of rain rode before the wind. They went into the bar and had a couple of drinks. Nobody asked any questions. The inhabitants of Skeleton didn't. Janson rose from a corner, stretching, and gave some kind of a signal to the bar boss before he ambled out the back.

The latter filled up their glasses. When they drained them, Willie-the-Wolf slapped a bill on the bar. The bar man shook his head. "Mr. Janson invites you over to his place to have one with him," he said.

Lowery and Vanning left and walked down the road a stretch. They turned into a side path that elbowed around a large ragged pit where the earth had fallen in. Finally they came to a little shack out among the dunes. Neither horse-tracks nor footprints marked the sand around it. But when they entered, Janson lounged behind one end of a rude table and four others sat around it.

"This is Willie-the-Wolf Vanning," Lowery said. "Like I told you."

Janson nodded and the others just stared. Forbes brushed sand and moisture from the red silk neckerchief at his throat. Grinned with his bleak eyes running over them slowly. They made a man feel as if the Wolf was looking at something behind them.

"Hell, you chunkheads! Wake up. I always expect nothin' less than a brass band! I'm Willie-the-Wolf, and everybody's heard o' me a-plenty. And my tonsils need irrigating."

WITHOUT saying anything, Janson picked up a jug from beneath the table and it was passed down. It was tequilla, Janson's favorite drink. Vanning slung it over an arm and put his mouth to the top and drank deeply. He gurgled and gurgled for some seconds, Adam's apple walking up and down his neck. He lowered it without gasping or sputtering.

"You over there by the stove," he said in that dry whisper, "you can plant your hogleg back in the holster. I'm among friends—I hope. Yeah, I know your a-holding it behind the pipe; a gent gets a certain look in his eyes when he's got a trigger eared back under his thumb."

The man blushed sheepishly and Janson stopped yawning, genuine admiration on his face. "What made you head in here, Vanning?"

"A slug that clipped my head. Don't see so good right now; also the fact that I knew Skeleton don't have to curry the John Laws outa its whiskers more'n once a year."

"We got a way of handling 'em when they do stick their noses in." Janson admitted. "But maybe you heard that Yucca Harker is headed for these parts..."

Vanning pulled out a tailor-made cigaret. "Well, I heard stories about a gent called Little Joe, who cools off Harker and his breed dang pronto. I'd like to meet up with that Little Joe fella sometime."

"We'll see," said Janson sleepily. "Squat yourself; they's a box there."

One of the others said, "Figger to hang around long?"

Vanning nodded. "Been thinking. Might be a right good idee just to let these John Laws cool off. I been doing all right of late, anyways." He brought a hand from his pocket and tossed a roll of gold-backed bills on the table. "And how about gettin' a few more jugs of redeye and starting a little card game? Mebbe-so you gents and me could swing some business in these parts together, too." He laughed in that same dry whisper. "Me, I never like to let my guns get rusty."

Janson laughed without mirth, but nodded his approval. "Lowery, you wanta pick the boys to go for the redeye? If it's all right with you." Janson never seemed to give any orders.

A game of stud got under way when the men came back with the redeye. The day died, and one of the men made some chow of jerked beef and greasy beans. Some left, and another man drifted in. The game continued without break as thunder in the north ushered in the night. The jugs kept going around and Vanning put out the dinero for another one later in the evening. He lost more than three hundred dollars, and drew another chunk of dinero from his money-belt as if it were nothing.

Lowery slid half off his chair and snored loudly. Two of the others staggered out into the night, homeward bound. Another staggered over to a bunk in the corner and dropped off. Willie-the-Wolf and Janson faced each other across the table. Vanning stopped riffling the deck and threw it against the bottle that held the candle that lighted the room.

"When that Yucca Harker hits here, I'll admit, I got sense enough to make tracks."

Janson massaged the jaw of his predatory face with big-boned knuckles. "That so?"

"Yep. Because this Little Joe isn't going to burn down Harker like he's handled other snooping badge packers. Too bad. But—well, this Little Joe is going to go to Hell on a shutter."

Janson's face hardened imperceptibly. "You think so?"

"I know it. I saw Harker shoot once. He's plain double-barrelled poison—a walkin' lead-spitting devil. Have another drink?"

They talked of other things. The Wolf told about the time he raided a bank in a Border town and hid out in the sheriff's own privy. They drank steadily. Janson told about the time Seely, the U. S. marshal, came in look-

ing for Little Joe; how the marshal was taken out, looped across his saddle, dead.

"Oh, that Little Joe must've been good all right. But his luck has run out now. I know Yucca Harker." He yawned.

JANSON'S leathery skin drew drum tight over his face bones. He smote the table a heavy blow. "Ye don't know Joe! He can't be killed! I—know."

Willie-the-Wolf nodded knowingly. "Sure. I heard that one. About the heap big medicine of that gray coat. I know. He's probably fast as spittin' lightning, so that nobody's really got a chance to hit him yet. But this Harker is faster 'n anything human, and a dead-center shot."

Janson rose to his gaunt height to put some wood in the stove. "Little Joe is the best gol-danged son of Hell with a hogleg in his—" But Vanning waved him silent wearily, shoved over the deck of cards. "I'll cut you—best two outa three—for fifty, Janson; and let's have another drink."

Janson won the cut and chucklingly pocketed the fifty smackers. They had several more slugs of the redeye, Vanning cursing his gambling luck. He kept sloshing redeye in their tin cups. "I hear this Little Joe can't carry much whiskey," he said suddenly after draining another shot.

Janson spat into a corner, face darkening. He picked up the jug that time, filling the mugs to the brim. "Never saw a man he couldn't toss 'em down with!... You with me on this one?" They drank.

Some fifteen minutes later, Janson's long chin was on his chest and he dozed. Silently Vanning rose and slipped out the door to glide off among the dunes...

It was broad daylight when Willie-the-Wolf came out of the sage and walked unconcernedly to the shack. The only tracks about it were his own left in leaving it. Yet, when he pushed open the door and found it empty inside he showed no surprise. He looked in the door of the shed off it, saw nobody, and went back and had a drink from one of the jugs. Then he dropped into a chair, after unbuckling his guns and placing them on the table, and napped.

He was the picture of an hombre among friends, and with nothing to fear, when Janson himself inched open the door from the shed. Janson stood studying him for a long time, a cocked gun held flat against his leg. One of Willie-the-Wolf Vanning's eyelids fluttered open. He grinned.

"Where the hell were you?" Janson grated.

The Wolf seemed surprised he should be asked. Shrugged. "Holy snakes, Janson, I'm smart; me, I don't aim to get snapped in any trap when this Harker walks in. And you never can tell when he'll hit here. I went out and caught my shut-eye in the brush." He made no move to protect himself.

Janson scrutinized him, then holstered his gun. Spoke over his shoulder to others in the shed behind him. When he opened the door wide and entered, though, the shed was empty. Willie-the-Wolf appeared not to notice. He slid the jug across the table. Outside, the blotched fever sore of sun burnt through overcast sky to give the day a sullen unreal look.

Janson bestrode a chair, fingering beard stubble. "Now things're coming back to me. It was 'bout six-seven years ago you held up the Pioneer Limited plumb in the station at Steerhead, weren't it? Shot it out with and killed Smoke Lang, the sheriff, there, too." He had evidently been talking with somebody since Vanning left.

"Right—and wrong," the latter said. "It was at Steer Run. And I shot it out with Smoke—but I didn't kill him."

Janson actually gave a friendly grin then before he tilted the jug. "Yeah, that's it; I got a mite mixed up."

The Wolf said, "Did Little Joe ask that?"

"Maybe," said Janson.

"I sure would like to have met up with that gent while he was still alive, by grab!"

Janson jerked up straight in the chair. "Holy snakes, he's still alive! You talk as if he—" His voice was sharp, torn with emotion.

Willie-the-Wolf smiled wisely. "Not for long, Mr. Harker's coming." Janson rose and started to speak. Vanning half turned his back as he cupped a match to a cigaret. "Now don't be giving me that stuff about how this Joe is something supernatural—or a walkin' dead man—or any of that wind-bellied stuff. His luck's run out; Harker'll get him!"

"Shut up!" Janson snarled fiercely. His lidded eyes glittered and sweat stained his forehead. "I'll tell you something, dammit! None of them dumb badge-packers who've come in here for him—none of 'em have gotten a shot at Little Joe! Never! He's too damn smart for 'em."

"Wh-what?" The Wolf sneered.

"By Gawd, that's true. I'll tell you —I'll tell you." He was a man shouting against his own ragged nerves. "Most of 'em around here don't know it, but some of the old mine workings run right plumb under this ol' ghost town itself. Little Joe—he knows them workings like the palm of his hand. He—" He broke off as he sighted something through the grimy window. Then a running man burst in the door.

"A fella just come into the bar," he panted, "a deputy I reckon. Brought a message from Yucca Harker. He's outside now, and he's callin' Little Joe. Harker says he'll be comin' down the street at high noon. And if Little Joe don't show, he's going to burn the place to the ground and smoke out every last polecat. That's what he called us!"

Janson was indifferent, stretching lazily. "I'll go take the word to Joe..." He moved toward the door to the shed. "Willie, better hunt yourself a hole; go down to the bar and you'll see Little Joe handle this Yucca man..."

THE SULLEN spot of sun glared down from directly overhead. Midday. Skeleton lay in the brush and sand like its name, dead and dry and inert, in a torpor. Only from the cracked shutters of the barroom did a few pair of eyes peer furtively. The rest of the ragtag and scum that composed its population had hunted safety in the brush. A lean packrat moved unhurriedly and curiously along the ragged fringe of the single street. Then he halted, head lifted. Down by the corner where the *Buffalo Girl Dance Hall* had stood in the old days, a human figure stepped past its barnlike frame.

The man moved to the middle of the road and then advanced purposefully, tanned hands hooked over gun butts, head swivelling from side to side nervously. "Yucca..." There was no voice that said it. It just went up like a soft swelling echo. Then one of the men behind the barroom shutters croaked: "Holy snakes, it's that same red-shirted one who was here the other day tellin' about Willie-the-Wolf. Ain't it?"

It was; but nobody answered him in the airless, closed-up bar. Something had happened there.

Down in the other direction a figure swathed in a long, gray coat appeared from the brush. His sombrero was yanked low and a red bandanna screened the lower half of his face. He advanced in short, quick and yet unsteady strides like a desperate man. The butts of guns protruded from the coat pockets and his jerking hands suddenly clamped on them and half drew. The pair drew to within twenty-odd yards of each other, the gray-coated one having already passed the barroom. He halted, sidled hesitantly.

From the flat roof of the one-storied barroom, Willie-the-Wolf Vanning

shouted, "Hey, Little Joe!" But his voice was sharp and harsh with threat, no longer a whisper. And the figure that had seemed to step out of the ground amid the litter of caved-in shacks and debris off from one side of the road twisted. He too had his face masked with a red bandanna.

Atop the sagging-roofed bar, Willie-the-Wolf went for his holsters. Hog-legs seemed to spring into the hands of Little Joe, a tall, lank figure, as he scuttled sideward in the brown grass. Then their weapons were blasting, spanging lead bridging the distance behind them. A hole gaped in Little Joe's hat; a slug ripped through the side of Vanning's shirt and seared the flesh over his ribs. But he was somehow an implacable little figure; he gave no sign of it. Lead drilled Little Joe's shoulder and knocked him down. He rolled behind a rotting piece of cabin wall. Willie-the-Wolf leaped from the roof and raced through the brush.

The dying reverberations of shots came from the road. The red-shirted deputy had opened fire coolly after the gray-coated one had triggered twice frantically. The latter had hit ground and rolled twice when his gray coat flopped open and his mask fell off. It revealed him as pot-bellied Lowery, the livery stable man; he was shot in the leg and the hip.

The Wolf zigzagged as he neared the debris where Little Joe had gone down. Willie rounded a hummock and searched in vain for his man. And then a gun barrel followed by a lean arm, next by the masked face, rose from the sand stealthily. Rose from the small hidden hole of a cave-in that led to a tunnel of the old mine workings into which he'd been trying to crawl like a snake. Willie-the-Wolf wheeled and the gun muzzles frothed red.

Little Joe writhed up and up into full view like a stung thing, writhing in the agony of the death wound that had blasted a hole in his head. His guns slid to the sand. Then he went crashing forward as he buckled into the brush. A twig of the latter twitched the bandanna from his face and revealed the hawkish cold features of Janson.

Back in the barroom the drink-wrangled bar-boss sat on the floor, rubbing a lump on his skull. Out in the wastes of Skeleton a report drifted at times as the deputies hunted out the cowed, fleeing inhabitants from their warrens. Lowery sat propped on a chair in agony, cursing feebly. "Y-you—you're Yucca Harker!" he threw at Willie-the-Wolf. The latter nodded quietly.

"I always said I never heard o' that Willie-the-Wolf Vanning," the bar-boss said, trying to be superior.

Yucca Harker shook his head as he lifted a drink and passed another to Red Shirt. "You're still wrong, mister. He existed—because I *was* him afore I went straight. That's why Janson was fooled... I went to the Big House an' got a governor's pardon, as Vanning, when I saved the warden's life in a prison break. Then I took back my old family name, Harker... The only thing that wasn't on the level was the gunfight at Hogarty's Gulch. Me and some of my boys faked that. But I am Yucca Harker—*and* Willie-the-Wolf Vanning. That's why I knew Janson—Little Joe—was going to get his chips cashed..."

★

In Our Next Issue

KEY WITNESS — A New Judge Steele

story by Lon Williams

CHINOOK

All the sourdoughs called him "Chinook",
For the reason that he'd come,
Like that good wind, unexpected,
While he'd always softly hum,
Opera tunes that he'd acquired—
He was never sayin' where—
Till the frost would sort of loosen,
An' Spring seemed to fill the air.

He was withered, bent an' grizzled,
An' appeared a lot too old
To be buckin' all the hardships,
That go with the quest for gold,
But he was one damned tough *hombre,*
An', though Yukon blizzards blew,
You could bet your dust an' nuggets
Chinook would come slammin' through.

Which is why, when big Jack Barry
Staggered in from Solomon,
With the news that black diptheria
Had that whole camp on the run,
An' the doctor needin' serum,
Chinook sighed, "I call that tough!
You blokes 'tend to Barry *pronto!*
I'll get goin' with the stuff!"

So he headed north from Dawson
With the serum on his sled,
Wrapped in thick furs, while the smother
Blotted out the trail ahead,
But he kept his huskies goin',
Shoutin' to his crackin' whip,
"This is no time to be loafin'!
Mush! We're fightin' Death this trip!"

Into Solomon he floundered
With his dogs dead six miles back,
An' the sawbones told him bluntly,
"Lord, your face is frozen black!"
"I'm O. K.! Hell!" Chinook mumbled,
"Here's the serum! Use it! Quick!
I'll feel great, when you are savin'
The poor devils who are sick!"

Edgar Daniel Kramer

THE BOLTER (*continued from page* 71)

would theenk he was keeked to deaths."

Sam rolled a cigaret and arched his eyebrows at Deputy Peters. "You know, Santos you had a good idea there, but remember this, an' you too, Deputy Peters; when a horse kicks a man, the toe of the shoe points downward and the heels point upwards." He popped the cigaret into his mouth, lit it and blew a great grey cloud of smoke toward Peters. "On Augustin's brother, the toe pointed toward the dead man's chin and the heels pointed toward his belt. In other words, that damned horse would have to have been lyin' on his back with all four feet in the air to leave the marks that were on the body."

Deputy Peters was a chastened lawman. He eyed Santos with a look of interest as though for the first time he had ever known a man clever enough to commit murder without using the tried and true .45 bullet to do it with.

"I'll be damned to hell."

Sam regarded the smoky tip of his quirley with exaggerated attention and his mouth held a wry, downward twist. "That goes without saying, Deputy Peters. Lock up the prisoner and let's get on with the chess game."

Peters arose with alacrity inspired by unbounded respect. "Yes sir, Sheriff," he said.

★

YOUR BEST IN THE WEST

A Test by Cliff Campbell

SEE HOW you can score in this test of western knowledge. In Column A you will find ten words or expressions. In Column B you will find eleven words or expressions. Take your pencil in hand and place the appropriate word or expression in Column A, the number of a similar word or expression from Column B which is closely connected with it. If in doubt between two, you must make the better choice. There's one left over in Column B to throw off sheer lucky guessing. Then check with the answers and take off 10% for each error. If you hit 100% you become sheriff of the town; if between 70%-90% you can go prospecting for gold; and below that, all that's left for you is to do sheep herding.

Column A.

——Wyatt Earp
——Bass Outlaw
——Apache
——Maverick
——Aces and eights
——David Crockett
——Jeff Milton
——Herding
——Cross-buck
——Annie Oakley

Column B.

1. Wild Bill Hickok
2. The Alamo
3. Horses
4. Saddle
5. Killed Curly Bill Brocius
6. Chief of Police of El Paso
7. Frank Bulter
8. Sergeant in the Rangers
9. Mangus Colorado
10. Unbranded
11. John Simson.

(Answers Are On Page 98)

RANGE WAR

(*continued from page 6*)

it wouldn't make half the stir that is made nowadays if one man shoots at another in Wyoming. The newspapers make all the difference."

The full force of such a remark can never be felt unless it has been one's fortune to live, at some time or other in his life, in a country where there were no newspapers and no law. He is then back at the beginning of the world, antedating civilization, and in a position to see the crude and grim forces underlying this human nature which pretends later to compose itself with the ways of society, but which has really a snarl and a claw not far away.

The newspaper accounts of the rustler war of 1892 were in many respects incorrect, the despatches coming from Buffalo, in Johnson County, the seat of the rustler element, being entirely contradictory to those emanating from Cheyenne, the headquarters of the big cowmen concerned in the raid. One gathers his beliefs in regard to the situation not from the newspaper accounts, but from thorough review of the matter upon one hand with a cowman who was one of the participants in the raid, and upon the other hand with some rustlers who were at Buffalo and thoroughly concerned in all the incidents which occurred on that side of the "war."

For a long time the rustlers had been making life a burden to the legitimate cowmen of the counties of Johnson, Natrona, and Converse, until they had nearly brought to a standstill all the proper operations of the cattle industry. Before the establishment of the livestock commission, and the brand inspectors, it was impossible for a ranchman to tell whether he was going to come out at the end of the year with any cattle left. Practically the whole country was living on stolen beef, and not content with this, and with serving notice on the cattle companies that they would no longer be allowed to hold their roundups, the rustlers began to ship beef by carload lots to the markets of the East.

As there were no brand inspectors to detect the fraudulent nature of such shipments, there was imminent danger that the illegal cattlemen would entirely ruin the legal ones. The extent of the losses suffered by the cattlemen may be inferred from the fact that, within the first year after the appointment of the brand inspectors at the markets, they sent back to the commissioners of the State $127,000 of "estray money" on cattle passing to market from the Wyoming range. The commissioners found proper ownership for all but $14,000 of this, but refused some of the funds to rustlers who openly claimed dues therein.

This appearance of the action of the new cattle laws was extremely unsatisfactory to the rustlers; it resulted in a practical solidification of the various rustler factions, and made the county of Johnson a rustler settlement, where the cattlemen had no voice. In four years the cattlemen brought one hundred and eighty suits in Johnson County against rustlers for stealing beef or calves, but no jury could be found which would convict a man; and the only case in which a rustler was ever punished was one in which a thief had killed a cow and taken home a quarter of the beef. He was convicted of petty larceny, and assessed the value of the beef—about eighteen dollars.

THE RUSTLERS posed as small stockmen, and did all they could to array the interests of the actual small stockmen against those of the "barons," or ranch capitalists, claim-

ing that the fight was one of wealth against men in moderate circumstances, and asserting that as to the methods practised in acquiring cattle, the big ranchmen were no better than they should be. In this latter statement there was colour of truth in many instances; the fortune of more than one man engaged in the raid against the rustlers was more than probably laid in the early and active efforts of their foremen with the branding iron. When such foremen sought to carry on for themselves the old methods which they had practised for their employers, the latter made objection, feeling that there had been a change in the former relations of meum and tuum. There is large undercurrect of unwritten history on both sides of the question in this rustler war. Be that as it may, there was much bitterness felt on both sides, and no doubt both sides thought they had some partial justification in many things which they did or attempted to do.

Early in the spring of 1892, a number of the large cattle-owners met at Cheyenne and resolved upon a general raid against the rustlers. They had the names of about one hundred and twenty-five men whom they claimed to know were engaged in the rustling business, some thirty-five of whom they agreed among themselves either to kill or drive out of the country. In this movement to invoke the oldtime ways of the range were several men prominent in State affairs; a member of the Legislature; a member of the stock commission; and some two dozen wealthy cattlemen, several of whom were practically non-resident Easterners who had large holdings of cattle in Wyoming.

There never was a more select, or a more inefficient, lynching party that started out across the plains. Nearly all the cowmen of the movement were men of culture and refinement; two Harvard graduates were among the outfit. There was a young Englishman along to see the fun—which he saw—and, all in all, the gathering was, so-

cially speaking, everything that could be asked. It was incidentally reported in one of the newspapers that one of the select lynchers, while asleep in camp one day, chanced to toss out his hand over his blankets, thus displaying two large diamond rings which he wore as part of his range costume.

It is now justly to be said of these men that they were not brave and determined, and it probably never occurred to them that they would fail of carrying out their program, as arranged in detail, without experiencing any great hindrance on the part of the men they were intending to hang, shoot, or drive out of the country. They had read of such things being done, and agreed that it was desirable they should do some of those things for themselves. That one of their number who tells this story of the raid admits frankly that they made a great mistake.

They were all new at that sort of business, Eastern men who had not been reared in the hard school of the old times, and who, while they might have been fit for privates in such an enterprise, were absolutely unfit for leaders—in which latter capacity there seems to have been a general willingness to serve. The men who should have been in charge were the men who were hired by the day to serve as privates—twenty fighting Texans, cowpunchers from the lower range, who were imported for this purpose and paid five dollars a day and expenses

[*Turn To Page* 86]

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to go along and see or assist in the hanging, shoot, and driving out. Had the leader of the cowboys been the leader of the party, the result might have been, at least in some respects, different; for here was a man with followers who, though they had not accumulated enough funds to afford to wear diamond rings when going to a lynching, had nonetheless served in the rude apprenticeship of Western life on the plains, and knew far more about partisan campaigning than all the men who acted as the leaders of this raid.

THE PARTY as finally organized numbered forty-three men, including the twenty Texans, and their outfit was as perfect as money could buy. They had three wagons and plenty of cooks, and evidently intended to travel in perfect comfort. Secretly embarking their outfit on a train at Cheyenne at night, early in April, 1892, they went by rail to Capser, Wyoming, arriving there the following night. Thence they started with their horses and wagons overland across the wild country, something like one hundred and thirty miles, which lay between them and the seat of war.

The first serious business of the expedition was at the K. C. ranch, occupied by two well-known rustlers, Nate Champion and Nick Ray. The raiders held up this ranch at daybreak, and early in the morning took prisoners two freighters who happened to be stopping at the house, and who came out of the house to go toward the barn. The house was then surrounded by a firing party of twelve men, it being supposed that Champion and Ray would soon miss the other men and come out to see what had become of them. Presently one of the rustlers, Ray, stepped to the door, and at once fell under the rifle-fire of the men who lay concealed and waiting for him. The participants in this raid are very reticent in regard to the names of those who did any shooting, but one of the

[*Turn To Page* 88]

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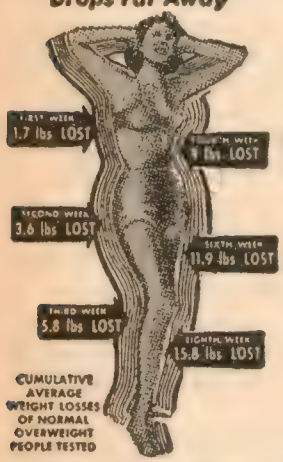

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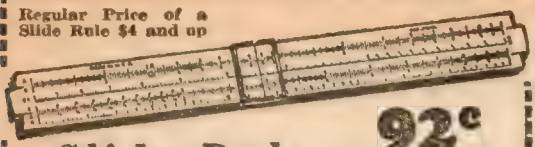

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freighters taken prisoner afterward said that it was a smooth-faced boy, one of the Texas fighters, who took the first hurried aim and shot Ray down. Ray was shot again as he crawled back into the house. The other rustler, Champion, remained game till the last and refused to come out, keeping up his fire upon the besiegers whenever opportunity offered. Champion was finally driven out by means of fire. A wagon-load of hay was pushed up against the ranch house and set on fire, so that the cabin was burned over the head of the rustler defending it. The body of Ray was later found burned and charred.

When the heat became too much for him, Champion ran from the burning house, endeavouring to reach a little gully nearby. He was shot as he ran, and it was later said that twenty-eight wounds were found in his body. The rustler side in this war claim that when Champion was first shot down he was only wounded, and asked the men who came up to him not to shoot again, but that one of the party placed his rifle to Champion's face and deliberately shot him as he lay upon the ground. The body of Champion was left with a card pinned to it bearing the inscription, *"Cattle Thieves, beware."*

In Champion's pocket, after his death, there was found a roughly written memorandum of the events of the day as they appeared to him as he was shut in his cabin by the invading party. He told of the suffering of his comrade, Ray, stated the hour of Ray's death, mentioned his efforts to get a shot at the men who were firing at him, stated calmly that he did not think he could hold out much longer, and mentioned the appearance of the wagon-load of hay which he knew was to burn him out. Then, as though in deliberate address to his fellows of the range, he wrote, "Boys, I guess it is all up. Good-bye."

Had the fact not been established clearly otherwise, it might have been seen from the simple nature of this

pitiful little scrawl that the rustler Champion was a brave man. He had long been known and dreaded by the cattlemen.

WHILE THE siege of the K. C. ranch was in progress, two men came along the trail with a wagon; owing to the poor management by the leaders of the raiders, these men were allowed to escape, which they did at full speed on the horses which they took from the wagon. It happened that one of these men was Jack Flagg, a a man whose brand was odious in the eyes of more than one of the cattlemen who could here have held him prisoner. Flagg was one of the prominent men among the resident range-people who were accused of rustling. His escape meant the ruin of the raiders' expedition. Flagg never drew rein until he had alarmed his friends from the K. C. ranch to the town of Buffalo. In twelve hours, all Rustlerdom was alarmed and hurrying to the combat. The town of Buffalo, the county seat of Johnson County, and the headquarters of the free-range element, was at once aroused into that deadly fury which among Western men means but one thing: Immediate war was to be given those who had carried war into this country.

Nor was this war upon the side of the rustlers to be without show of

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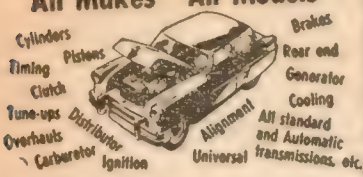

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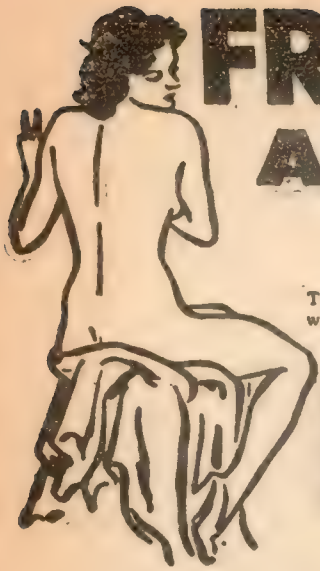
legal justice. It is all very well to say that the principle of the majority is a dangerous principle in the hands of dangerous men; yet how can this principle be legally set aside in any forms of this government, whether in the election of officers national or municipal? Legally speaking, the county of Johnson was as regularly organized as any, and a man who lived there had as good a right to vote for the officers of that county as has any man of any part of the Union. The residents of Johnson County had legally elected as their sheriff, Red Angus, who was therefore the recognised agent of the law.

As sheriff, Angus summoned about him a posse of the citizens of Buffalo and vicinity, in numbers sufficient, as he thought, to accomplish the arrest of the invading party of raiders—who of course, had no legal status whatever in that country, and who were breaking laws of a nature always held to be higher than those laws which they accused the rustlers of violating. Surely a more dramatic or more involved situation never appeared upon the cow-range than this, when two armies, each armed, each able and anxious to kill, met each other to decide an issue—an issue in which both were wrong. In no country but the West of the cattle-days could any such situation ever have arisen.

THE SHERIFF had a vast posse at his back when he started forth from Buffalo to arrest the band of cattlemen. The latter, knowing what would be the result of their mistake in allowing the two men to escape and spread the news, pushed on as fast as they could into the country where they expected to find others of the men whom they had upon their list as men to be shot, hung, or driven out of the country. They seem little to have known the seriousness of their undertaking, or the sternness of the men against whom they were proceed-

[*Turn To Page* 92]



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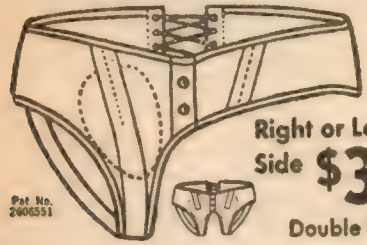

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ing—among whom, wrong as they were, were some of the best cowpunchers and hardiest plainsmen of the entire cattle-range. The raiders kept their wagons with them as long as they could, and then pushed on ahead, leaving their supplies behind them.

In a little while after that, the rustlers swarmed in upon the trail, seized the wagons, and took the teamsters prisoners. From that time the invaders ceased to be the pursuers, and became themselves the pursued. They stopped at the T. A. ranch, by this time discovering what the circumstances really were. Here they stood at bay and were surrounded by the forces of the rustlers. There were three hundred and nineteen men in the body which besieged the cattlemen at the T. A. outfit, the force being made up of rustlers and rustler sympathizers, with perhaps a great many others who were afraid to refuse the invitation to join the fight.

The cowmen were outnumbered, although they claimed that they expected re-enforcements from a body of Montana cattlemen within the week. Yet they were brave as any, and moreover they had intelligence and skill upon their side. They quickly fortified the T. A. ranch with regular rifle-pits, barricaded the building with logs, made firing-stands out of more logs, and really had things in fine shape for a long siege or hot attack. The rustlers constantly increased in numbers and were determined to kill or capture the entire party.

Firing was kept up at long range on both sides, though without much damage. One old fellow by the name of Boone, a plainsman with a big buffalo gun, was on the rustlers' side, and was extremely accurate with his fire. He would throw a big bullet against the ranch door, or through a window nearly every time he shot. There were twenty-six horses killed in one day in the T. A. corral by the rustler fire, and it must have appeared

[*Turn To Page 94*]

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to the cattlemen that they were soon to be set on foot in the middle of a very hostile country.

It was never admitted that any of the rustlers were killed in this long-range firing, and the cattlemen will not admit that they had any one killed in the fight, though they say that two of their men were accidentally killed. One of them was thrown by his horse, and his rifle accidentally discharged, shooting him through the thigh so that he afterward died. A second man, while hurrying out of the door of the ranch house to go after some water, knocked his own revolver out of its holster, and was so shot through the abdomen, dying later. One of these men was still living at the time of the surrender, and both of them came from the ranks of the cowpunchers who were hired to do the fighting.

The siege lasted for three days, the firing being kept up more or less steadily on both sides. The cattlemen claim that they knew many of the men in the rustler party were small stockmen, who were really not in sympathy with the rustlers, and who took pains to fire high when shooting at the ranch-house.

WHILE ALL this was going on, the entire civilized world knew every detail of the combat from day to day. The commanding officer of Fort McKinney, which lay so close to the T. A. ranch that the firing could be heard distinctly all the time, was asked by the county authorities to assist in the capture of the cattlemen. This he declined to do, and he also declined to lend the sheriff a cannon, or a Gatling gun, for use in carrying the barricaded ranch house. The rustlers then began plans for blowing up the ranch house with dynamite, they having found in the captured wagons one hundred pounds of that article intended for use against themselves, and having concluded that it would be well to show the cattlemen still more fully the unwelcome

situation of being hoist by one's own petard.

The commander at Fort McKinney wired his superior officer as to what course he should pursue, and the Government at Washington replied through the general in charge of the Department of the Missouri, stationed at Omaha, that the officer in command at Fort McKinney should put an end to this armed disturbance, and should turn over his prisoners to the proper authorities, but should not deliver any prisoners into the hands of the opposite faction. On the third day of the siege, a troup of cavalry rode out from Fort McKinney carrying a flag of truce, to which the cowmen answered. Their surrender to the United States forces was demanded, and to this they readily agreed upon the assurance that they would not be turned over to the authorities at Buffalo, which all knew meant the same thing as death. The sheriff demanded these prisoners of the United States troops, but was refused. There was then talk among the rustlers of taking away the prisoners by force and holding them for civil trial at Buffalo. No forcible attempt of this nature, however, was made—although there was very bitter feeling among the rustlers at seeing the invaders escape from them.

The officer in charge of the prisoners was instructed to take them away from the scene of conflict, removing them to Fort Russell, about one hundred miles below. Here, about three weeks after their outset from Cheyenne, without their outfit, without their horses, with two of their fighting men killed and two of their teamsters missing, they arrived at Fort Russell—not in the character of victorious returners, but as prisoners in charge of the United States troops. In condition they were somewhat different from that under which they had started forth. Some of them were sick; all were weary and bedraggled; and all the leaders were willing to admit that

[*Turn Page*]

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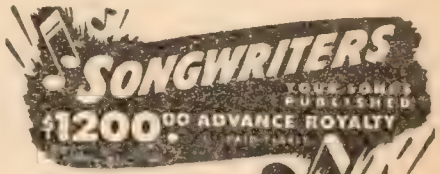

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they had had enough of the vigilante work for the time. They admitted that they had been mistaken and had not known what was before them, but still contended that their movement had of itself been just and right.

As every detail of the fight at the T. A. ranch had been given the public through the daily press, so was the report of each day's march of the return given to the world by the press correspondents. The inglorious little "war" attracted a national attention, and was for months the one theme of discussion in the State of Wyoming, where it figured for a long time in State politics, the two factions continuing their fight after they had been obliged to lay down their arms. By one party it was urged that these men should be taken back to Buffalo to be tried there, at the scene of their offence, but all knew what that meant, and the wealth of the cattle-men was brought into the legal fight which contested any such action.

The men were finally taken by the civil authorities to Laramie, and there succeeded in obtaining what they coveted—a change of venue to Cheyenne, where they were among their friends and on their own ground. The methods of modern law, which they had but a few months ago violated and held in contempt as unsuited to themselves, they now hailed fervently as the one thing to which all men should submit, and gladly enough availed themselves of it as their only means of salvation. So far from desiring to be set free, they clung with ludicrous eagerness to their prison, and actually paid their own expenses to be allowed to remain in jail!

This they did for three months, knowing it would bankrupt any of those scantily populated counties to keep so large a party of prisoners, and they being desirous of anything rather than the boon of liberty just then—since liberty meant danger and imprisonment offered them safety!

[*Turn To Page* 98]

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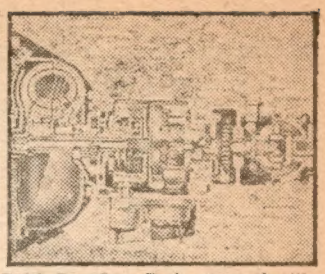

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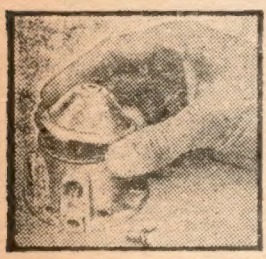

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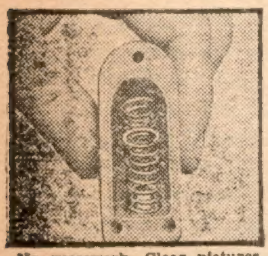

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Their plans were successful, and that law which they had scorned, and under which they now cowered, took care of them better than they perhaps deserved.

IT WAS NOW the time not of the old West, but the new West. All the wealth and influence of the most heavily-populated portions of Wyoming were with the cattlemen, and it was foregone that they would not be convicted. When finally heard in court, these men were all set free upon their own personal recognisance, each man charged with the murder of two men, Champion and Ray, and each offence made bailable in a very large sum of money, the total of bail for the forty men or so tried, amounting into the millions. This the cattlemen were able to produce, or to pay if necessary, but of course the Texas fighting men were not. The latter, acting under advice of counsel, left the country, "jumping" their bonds.

During the trial, the cattlemen were practically given their liberty, being asked to attend at court at certain hours of the day. A list of over one thousand possible jurymen was called, and at a time when not even half of the peremptory challenges of the accused had been exhausted, it became apparent that it would be impossible to get a jury. It was actually seen that the affair was too big for the courts of the State to handle. The prosecution for the State *nolle prossed* the cases. These men were therefore never tried, never acquitted, and yet can not be again arrested on the old charges.

There are few of these cattlemen who care to speak much about the matter nowadays, and probably most of them still remain enthusiastic supporters of the law of the land today; or at least they should if they possess the trait of gratitude. Indeed, the law has gradually taken sway in Rustlerdom as the country has grown older, and now the battles are referred to the courts by both parties to much greater extent. Some of the rustlers have become bold enough to openly forswear the old ways. Some have turned State's evidence. Yet others are now employed by the cattlemen, and make the best cowpunchers possible to be found. In the odd conditions of the range, it has already been agreed between these late armed foes that bygones are to be bygones.

Thus ended the last of the great wars of the range, and the only one that has ever been a ludicrous one. It might not have been so much smiled at had it succeeded, but success on either side might have been a very unfortunate thing. The attempt failed partly because the men who made it were not suited for such work. Not plainsmen themselves, they undertook the methods of plainsmen. They might far better have clung to the ways under which they had been born and brought up, and to which they so gladly returned when they found they could not negotiate the ways of the old West. Indeed, their fundamental mistake was one of chronology. Suddenly it had grown too late for the old ways; the old West was gone.

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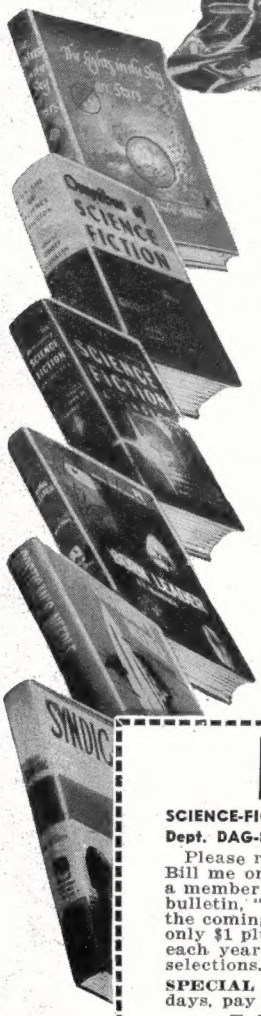

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